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CORSE DE LEON:

OR,

THE BRIGAND.

A ROMANCE.

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF

"THE ROBBER," "THE GENTLEMAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL," ETC., ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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CORSE DE LEON;

OR,

THE BRIGAND.

CHAPTER I.

The sky was still gray, when Bernard de Rohan, up and dressed, stood waiting in his own chamber till his horses, which seemed somewhat long in coming, were brought forth into the court of the inn. As he did so, he slowly and thoughtfully drew his sword from the scabbard, and, pressing the point against the ground, bent the weapon nearly double. Then, withdrawing his hand suddenly, he suffered it to spring back again, and the well-tempered blade became instantly as straight as it was before.

The young gentleman marked it with a smile, and, putting the true friend in need back again into the scabbard, he walked down the stairs and spoke a few words to the host at the door, till his horse being at length led forward, he sprang into the saddle and rode out, as if taking the way to Geneva.

When he had gone about a mile, he met a peasant coming in on a gayly-decorated mule, bringing supplies for the good city; and as the man gave him the good-morning, the baron asked whether there were any travellers on the road before him.

"Oh ay," replied the man, "a fair party as you would wish to see, and a gallant gentleman at their head. Perchance you are looking for them?"

"It may be so," replied Bernard de Rohan. "How far are they in advance, my good friend?"

"Truly you must use whip and spur," replied the man, "for I passed them a good hour and a half ago, beyond Mirebel, and they were going at a mad rate."

Bernard de Rohan did apply the spur; and in a much

less time than an hour and a half, passed through the small hamlet of Mirebel, and under the old castle which then stood upon the hill beyond. Inquiring at one of the cottages as he passed on, he again heard of the same party, but still found that they were far in advance of him; nor, by the accounts of the peasantry, did he seem to have gained upon them much, when he was once more obliged to pause in order to refresh his horse.

"It will be night before I overtake them," he thought; "but I will overtake them, or die."

Such resolutions are always very, very vain, as, indeed, is every other resolution of human nature. Tossed as we are upon the sea of circumstances, and never knowing where the next wave may bear us, there is but one resolution which man can safely take, with even a probable hope of not breaking it—the resolution of doing right, whatever may be the event. Then, even then, he must count with daring boldness upon the stability and the firmness of that most weak and wavering thing, his own heart.

Bernard de Rohan resolved to overtake them or to die, and with that resolution he rode on. At Mont Luel he heard of them again, and eagerly pursued his way, till, towards the afternoon, he arrived, with tired horses, at the small town of Pont d'Ain. He had heard of the party that he sought at every place where he had paused to inquire, even as far as the village of Varambon, which, as the reader well knows, is scarcely a mile and a half from the pleasant little town of Pont d'Ain. In the latter place, at that time, though it was directly on the way, as the road then lay, from Paris to Chambery, and a castle belonging to the Duke of Savoy stood upon the heights, seeming to claim it as a part of his dominions—at that time there was but one inn in the place which afforded accommodation for man and horse. There were two or three houses, indeed, of the kind called *Repues*, where travellers on foot were entertained; but to the other house, or the Gite, as it was called, Bernard de Rohan directed his steps, and immediately, on dismounting, inquired for the party of horsemen which had preceded him.

"The gentleman and his servant," replied the hostess, who was the person to whom he addressed himself, "the gentleman and his servant, who came about two hours and a half ago, have both gone out, and are to re-

turn by supper-time; but there has no other party, sir, either stopped here or passed through Pont d'Ain to-day."

Such tidings were not to be believed by Bernard de Rohan; and, although he had passed through Pont d'Ain more than once before, and had every reason to believe that there was no other inn in the place, he now imagined that in this respect he must be mistaken; and, saying that he also would return to supper, he set out to inquire at every other house of public entertainment in the town, whether the person whom he sought for had as yet arrived.

The purposes with which he went were certainly of a fierce and stern kind: he felt that he had been deeply and bitterly wronged, and he went to punish him who had done it; but, as he walked on, there was a calm sweetness in the air, somewhat tempered from the heat of noon, which in a degree soothed him, and caused a feeling of sorrow at being forced to perform so bloody a task, to mingle with the other sensations in his bosom.

He inquired at more than one place whether there was any other inn than that at which he had stopped; but found that there was none where the party which he sought could have paused for the night. At every other auberge, also, the same story was told him, that no persons had passed through the town that day, nor had any party of consequence entered the town except the cavalier and his servant who had put up at the great inn, and who, it appeared, had been seen by every one. One old woman, to whom he applied, began to enlarge upon the grace and beauty of the cavalier; and Bernard de Rohan, thinking that Adrian de Meyrand might possibly have left some of his attendants behind on the road, or sent them in some other direction, began to question her as to whether she had remarked which way the gentleman took when he left the inn, and could point it out to him.

"Doubtless I can, sir," she said in reply. "He seemed to saunter forth quite idly, and looked about the town. Then he walked up towards the castle, and then cast his eyes up the river, and came down again, and crossed the bridge, and I saw him go slowly up, gazing upon the water as if wondering at its clearness."

"That is not like Adrian de Meyrand," thought Bernard de Rohan, as the woman spoke. "He has no such tastes as that. Nevertheless, I will make myself sure;"

and, following the way that the good lady pointed out to him, he too crossed the old bridge, and walked quickly on at the side of the Ain by a path which skirted the river, and along which the high road is now carried. He pursued this path for nearly two miles before he perceived any human being, except here and there, in the fields around, some of the peasantry gathering in the abundant gifts of Nature, or boys and girls scaring the birds from the vines. At length, however, the young cavalier perceived another gentleman, sitting in a picturesque situation on a bank overhanging the stream, and gazing down upon the water. He was amusing himself by pitching off pebbles from the bank with the point of his sword scabbard, while his hat and plume lay beside him, and his long dark hair fluttered in the summer breeze.

The stranger was evidently not Adrian de Meyrand, but yet the form was familiar to Bernard de Rohan. He could not see the face, indeed; but the figure, the attitude, the employment, each instantly served to awaken remembrances of other days, and to tell him that there before him sat Henry de Brienne, the brother of his own dear Isabel. The young gentleman did not perceive that any one approached; and, the path which his friend followed passing over the bank behind, Bernard de Rohan came within a step of him without rousing him from his revery. The attitude and countenance of Henry de Brienne were both melancholy, and Bernard de Rohan heard him sigh deeply.

"Henry," said the young soldier, laying his hand on his arm, "Henry, this is a strange meeting."

Henry of Brienne started up, and, drawing a step back, gazed upon Bernard de Rohan with an inquiring and bewildered look. "Mortbleu!" he exclaimed at length, grasping his companion's hand, "here is the dead alive again! Why, Bernard, 'tis but this morning I heard of your death. Intelligence the most certain was brought of your being crushed under one of the towers of the castle of Masseran; and you have no earthly right to be alive."

"Has that story travelled even hither?" said the young cavalier: "Rumour has certainly quicker wings than the wind, for that false tale to have reached even the Pont d'Ain in four or five days."

"Nay, it was in Lyons that I heard it," replied Henry de Brienne, "and there dame Rumour appeared on a

horse's back, and clothed in the dress of a courier of the Lord of Masseran's."

"Were you then in Lyons this morning?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, eagerly.

"In truth was I," his companion answered; 'even at the inn called the Dolphin, Bernard; and, had you but sought for me there, you would have found me with more than one old friend of yours."

"With Adrian de Meyrand?" replied Bernard de Rohan: "where is he now, Henry? He it is I am now seeking. Did he come with you hither?"

"Not only Meyrand," replied the young count, without directly answering his friend's question, "not only Meyrand, but the Lord of Masseran also would you have found, had you but visited the Dolphin. But come, let us return to the inn, and, like statesmen and lawyers, discuss all things over our supper;" and, thus saying, he drew his friend back in the direction of the town.

"But where is the Count de Meyrand?" again demanded Bernard de Rohan. "Henry, he has basely wronged me; and if he be anywhere within reach, I must find him, and make him give me a reason for what he has done."

"He is far away by this time," replied the other, in a careless tone, that did not much please his companion. "Why, Bernard, he is at Moulins ere now, and will be in Paris before you can reach him."

"Then he came not on with you hither?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, seeing that the prey had escaped from him. "This is unfortunate."

"No; he returned to Paris as quick as he came," replied Henry of Brienne. "It was my good lord and stepfather who came hither with me; but if you would know, dear friend, how it all fell out, you shall hear the tale;" and he proceeded to give Bernard de Rohan as clear an account as his own knowledge would afford, of all that had taken place in Paris affecting the marriage of his friend and his sister.

Bernard de Rohan listened in silence, with busy but bitter thoughts chasing each other through his brain, while Henry proceeded. "I set out alone," continued Henry de Brienne, after having detailed the announcement of the edict, "I set out alone, and, to say sooth, I did not much covet the good Lord of Masseran as a travelling companion. I had scarcely reached the third

post, however, when I was overtaken by my amiable stepfather and the Count de Meyrand: the Lord of Masseran being bound by the king's commands to set you instantly free; and the good count, I have a notion, being very desirous of helping me to seek for Isabel. When, however, we heard this morning at Lyons, by a courier from Savoy, that you were buried under the ruins of one of the towers, the count sped back again to Paris, to make his claim to the hand of Isabel good before the king, while the Lord of Masseran did me the honour of accompanying me almost to the gates of the Pont d'Ain. I was very anxious to get rid of him; but I knew it might be difficult to do so straightforwardly, and therefore, by a word spoken now and then during our morning's ride, I just let him understand that the King of France was very likely to visit your death upon his head somewhat severely, if he did not seek that gracious monarch at once and tell his own story first. I insinuated this fact more than asserted it, and he consequently became so strongly possessed with that idea, that he quitted me where the road turns off, leaving me to pursue my search alone. Here, however, we are, once more upon the bridge, and I trust that supper is ready, for I am an hungered."

"Have you any clew," demanded Bernard de Rohan, "to guide you in your search for Isabel? She, too, it seems, is persuaded that I am dead, and I long to find and comfort her."

"I have no certain clew whatever," replied Henry de Brienne, in an indifferent tone. "She escaped from the charge of Meyrand, it would seem, somewhere about Bourgoin, and he, suspecting that Masseran had taken her, followed with all speed to Paris. As soon as he found his mistake, however, he sent off a servant to watch for her at Lyons, and gain what intelligence he could of the course she pursued. From this man we learned last night that a lady had paused at that inn, whom, from a slight glance he obtained of her face in the close litter that bore her, he could have sworn was Isabel herself; but she stayed not for more than a few minutes, and then took the road onward towards Geneva. What should lead her to Geneva I cannot conceive; and, moreover, the fellow represents her as being accompanied by an almoner and a large train, which how poor Isabel should get I cannot divine. However,

as this was the only trace of her to be found, I felt myself bound to follow it, and here I am upon that course without any great tidings to guide me farther. If one may believe the people at the inn here, there were at least fifty ladies, and fifty large trains, and fifty almoners passed through the Pont d'Ain yesterday; but, at all events, I shall gain intelligence at the frontier, for they would not allow a number of men to pass without inquiry."

Bernard de Rohan heard him in silence, pondering upon all the intelligence which had been given him. He now, for the first time, knew all that had taken place, and he felt that his situation was one of no slight difficulty. The ear of the king had evidently been gained by persons whom he had but too just a cause to regard as his enemies. Though neither he nor Isabel was directly mentioned in the edict of the king, his marriage had been formally annulled; and it became a question whether he should immediately proceed to Paris and endeavour to remove any prejudices created against him, leaving Henry of Brienne to seek for his sister and bring her to the court, or whether he should pursue the search for Isabel himself, and, accompanying her to the capital, lay claim to the hand which he still looked upon as plighted to him by ties that the will of no king upon earth could ever dissolve.

It may be asked whether the suggestion which had been made to him by Corse de Leon, of carrying her he loved to some foreign land, did not occur to his mind; and whether he did not feel tempted in some degree to follow it. It certainly did present itself to his recollection. It was, however, but as an image of what might be a last resource. He knew that the Church would hold his marriage to be good, whatever a retrospective law might say against it; and he did think that, under some circumstances, he might fly with Isabel to another land, and pass the rest of his days in voluntary exile, content with an inferior station, and happy in a union with her he loved. The picture, even, was a pleasant one to look upon; for, in contemplating sacrifices that we propose to make for the attainment of any great object, imagination is ever a kind friend to self-devotion, painting the consequences of our acts all bright, and concealing all the darker points of the future in a blaze of light. We see not, we calculate not upon a multitude

of minor miseries; neither do we take into consideration the remoter evils; it is the greater and the nearer pains and perils that we look to, and we find strength in the determination of our own hearts to vanquish these. But, at the same time, we do not remember that the strong cause, the motive which gave such vigorous impulse to all our actions, as to carry us through the first and more prominent obstacles, gradually loses its own power and activity, till at length the very memory of our first sensations dies away, and we are left to endure all the remote consequences without the sustaining power that bore us forward at first. The cannon-ball that tore its way through strong walls without a perceptible diminution of its speed, in the end of its course creeps slowly along the ground, and at length a child's hand may stop it as a plaything. Thus, in general, are the strong resolutions of encountering all evils for the attainment of one great purpose. They carry us forward impetuously through the first obstacles, but fall of themselves at length, and are overcome by petty impediments. No man, however, believes it will be so in his own case; for no one either sees all those petty impediments, or believes that the vigour of his resolution will ever fail.

To Bernard de Rohan, the thought of so flying with Isabel, and seeking fame and fortune in another land, offered a pleasant picture to his eye, but merely as a thing that might have been, had France been then groaning under a despotic tyrant, or which still might be, were any act of absolute injustice exercised against himself. Such, however, was not yet the case. The monarch was one very generally loved and esteemed; not, perhaps, a very great and politic sovereign, nor in any respect a man of resplendent genius, but still of an amiable and a kindly heart, of a noble and a chivalrous spirit, humane, and generous, and placable.

He paused not, then, upon the suggestion of Corse de Leon as a plan applicable to the moment; but, when he came to ask himself the question, which of the other two courses he should pursue, whether he should hasten on to the court alone, or accompany Henry of Brienne upon his search, the latter was soon chosen. "I should be wronging my own claims," he thought, "not to maintain to the last my right to Isabel's hand as her husband. The consent of her father having been given,

and given in her mother's presence, without the slightest opposition, must surely render this marriage a case not to be affected by the king's edict. I should be injuring her, then, I should be injuring myself, if I did not maintain my right by every means in my power; and, hand in hand with her, I will go to the foot of the throne, and require Henry's confirmation of our union."

There were other considerations, also, which led him towards the same course. There was in the manner of Henry of Brienne a certain sort of thoughtful abstractedness which was not natural to him. There was a reserve, a want of the open-hearted and somewhat careless frankness of demeanour which usually characterized him; a something, in short, which showed a difference between his affections at that time and his feelings in the years gone by. It was not that he was cold, or unkind, or unfriendly; but there was a shade upon him, a restraint, which made Bernard de Rohan but the more anxious to see Isabel himself, and accompany her to the court. His conduct, therefore, was easily determined; but, as his young companion continued thoughtful, and seemed little inclined to speak, Bernard de Rohan resolved to wait till the next morning ere he discussed with Isabel's brother the future plans they were to pursue.

They were near the inn, indeed, before Henry de Brienne's tale was concluded; and, once arrived there, supper had to be served, servants and chamberlains were coming and going, and no opportunity for private conversation presented itself. The hours went by, the sun went down, and Henry yawned, declaring that he was fatigued with his long journey.

Bernard de Rohan marked his conduct with some surprise, but agreed to his proposal of retiring to rest; and, though he himself, anxious to depart early on the following day, lost no time in seeking his pillow, he heard, with wonder and with pain, the steps of Henry de Brienne, in the adjoining chamber, walking up and down for more than an hour, and giving a direct contradiction to his pretence of fatigue.

"All is not right," thought Bernard de Rohan, "all is not right; and I must learn, as soon as possible, what is the matter here."

The lover was early up, as usual; but Henry de Bri-

enne did not appear for some time, and Bernard de Rohan sent a servant to his room to waken him.

"He would come to breakfast soon," was the reply the servant brought; but another hour went by, and he did not come; and when his friend went up himself to hasten him, he found him but half dressed.

Bernard de Rohan urged him to more speed somewhat impatiently; but the young gentleman seemed surprised, and heard his friend announce his determination of accompanying him in the search for Isabel with a look expressive of anything but satisfaction. Bernard de Rohan had to remember that it was Isabel's brother, and to put a guard upon his lips, lest any sharp or unkind word should escape him. Believing, upon reflection, that either the Lord of Masseran or the Count de Meyrand might have been labouring to shake Henry de Brienne's regard for him, he turned the subject during their breakfast to the conduct of both those persons, and displayed fully and fairly the proceedings of each. Henry de Brienne heard him almost in silence, and only observed, "Oh, everything is fair in love and war, you know, Bernard."

"And in friendship too?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, gravely. "If so, Henry, neither love nor friendship will bring happiness, nor war glory. A man of honour will pursue each honourably, or not at all. He who wins by other means loses more, surely, than he gains. But here are the horses, friend; let us not waste more time, I do beseech you."

Thus saying, he hastened out and sprang upon his horse. Henry de Brienne followed more slowly, and lost many a precious minute in inquiries and orders about nothing; mounting at length, he rode on in silence beside his friend. There was restraint on both sides; and Bernard de Rohan even thought that he perceived a degree of irritability in Henry's manner which was unpleasant to him; and yet the mood was strange, too: for, when Bernard strove to vanquish his restraint, and to remove the strange humour which had fallen upon him; when, for that purpose, he tried to lure his mind back to other years, and, through the memories connected therewith, to awaken the feelings and affections of those days; when he spoke of his early love for Isabel, and her love for him, and of all the things in the gone, by means of which association was likely to re

new a better spirit, Henry smiled with a melancholy air, and, casting down his eyes, thoughtfully murmured, "Those were happy days."

As soon, however, as the momentary effect had passed away, he fell into the same mood, and in conversation either displayed a quick and waspish impatience, or rambled wildly and idly over a thousand irrelevant subjects, ever keeping aloof from any mention of his sister and her union with Bernard de Rohan.

At the small town of Cerdon, near which the traveller first begins to climb the mountains of the Jura, the two gentlemen stopped to make inquiries, hoping there to obtain some more accurate information regarding the course of Isabel than they had met with at Pont d'Ain. Here, however, no trace of her was to be found. If, at their former resting-place, they had been confused by a multitude of accounts, here none was to be obtained at all. The simple fact met them in reply to every inquiry, that no lady, with any train, great or small, had passed by or through Cerdon during the several preceding days. This assurance was given, and repeated again and again, and how the search was to be pursued now became the question. At length it was determined to send out messengers in various directions, to the towns and villages round about, between Cerdon and the Pont d'Ain, to discover at what point Isabel had quitted the road to Geneva; and, not contented with trusting to others, Bernard de Rohan, after a short pause, declared that he would set forth himself, and trace back the way for some distance towards Lyons, inquiring at every village near which a crossroad turned off.

Henry de Brienne endeavoured to dissuade him from going, and then drew from him a hasty promise not to pursue the search, if he gained certain intelligence, without coming or sending for him.

"I must stay here," he said, "myself, unless I gain some clear information, as my good Lord of Masseran has promised to send me news of his reception at the court without a moment's loss of time. He travels post, and such tidings may soon come."

Bernard de Rohan paused not for farther inquiry, but went on his way, and during the whole of the rest of that day pursued the search, but in vain. On his return to the inn at Cerdon that night, he found that Henry de Brienne had set off, not long after himself, for Nan-

tua, leaving a message that he would be back as soon as he could.

He learned also that two of the messengers which had been sent out had returned, bringing no tidings; but a third arrived, towards eleven at night, with better success, having heard at the town of Bourg that a lady had passed in that direction, bearing so completely the description of Isabel that Bernard could not doubt her route was once more discovered.

"The people at the inn at Bourg," the man said, "declared she had taken her way towards Macon, and was travelling but slowly;" and the lover's heart beat eagerly to follow her at once, had he not been prevented by his promise to her brother. He looked anxiously, then, for Henry's return; but midnight passed, and it became no longer doubtful that he would remain at Nantua that night.

Bernard de Rohan took the precaution, however, to order a messenger to proceed at an early hour to Nantua, bearing intelligence to Henry de Brienne that the course his sister had taken had been discovered; but when he himself rose early the next morning, his friend had not made his appearance, and several more hours were passed by the young cavalier in somewhat angry impatience. At length, when, as far as he could calculate, full time and more than time had been given for Henry de Brienne to return from Nantua, he ordered out his horse, resolved to wait no longer, and was in the very act of mounting to depart, when the messenger he had sent rode up to the inn door, telling him that Isabel's brother had set off by the crossroad which led from Nantua direct towards Bourg, and begged him to join him at the village of Leissard.

Bernard de Rohan certainly felt somewhat indignant; but, followed by his servant, he put spurs to his horse in order to overtake his friend; and though, on account of the rivers and streams which intersect that part of the country, he had some difficulty in making his way, he yet arrived at Leissard in time to meet Henry de Brienne at the door of a little cabaret in the village. He could not refrain from giving some way to the feelings of anger which his friend's conduct had occasioned; and, though he spoke gently, he certainly spoke reproachfully.

Henry answered in a hot and fiery mood; and the old

lady of the inn, who was handing up a glass of the good wine of Bresse to the young gentleman, exclaimed, "Oh, don't quarrel, noble sirs, don't quarrel. It were a pity to see two such gentlemen anything but friends."

"Be not afraid, my good lady," replied Bernard de Rohan, "there is no fear of our quarrelling."

"On my life, I do not know that," replied Henry de Brienne; and, without more ado, he put a piece of money in the hostess's hand, and spurred on. It was then that Bernard de Rohan first perceived that his friend was quite alone, having no longer even the servant with him who accompanied him from the Pont d'Ain to Cerdon; and, riding fast after him, he asked him where was his groom, more for the purpose of beginning a new subject than anything else.

"I have left him to wait for Masseran's courier," replied the young count, in a surly tone. "But I see not what you have to do with that."

"Nay, nay, Henry," replied his friend, "do not make a quarrel out of nothing! In what I said just now, I merely wished to point out, that when two people are pursuing a search of this kind together, they must act upon some arranged plan."

"I really do not see," said Henry de Brienne, turning his head towards him sharply, but still riding on, "why we should pursue this search together at all. I do not want your company in it; and, in fact, would a great deal rather be without it. I am seeking my sister, in order that she may be placed under the king's protection as well as mine, and on such a search I would rather proceed alone."

Bernard de Rohan remonstrated in vain, and then, using a higher tone, explained to him briefly his views and purposes, which were the views and purposes of an honourable and upright man.

"I have nothing to do with all that," replied Henry de Brienne. "I have merely to say that I don't choose to be followed and tutored, guided and directed, by you. The matter has gone far enough."

"Too far, Henry!" replied Bernard de Rohan, with his cheek very red. "Be assured, however, that whatever you say or do will make no difference to me. I shall pursue my search for Isabel, having myself obtained information of where she is, without scruple and without hesitation, whether it pleases you or not."

"Then you shall certainly pursue your search by yourself," answered Henry de Brienne, with an angry gesture, "for you shall not accompany me. I am in no mood to be trifled with;" and his left hand rested upon the hilt of his sword.

"Nay, nay, Henry," replied Bernard de Rohan, with a sorrowful smile, "this is really too much. You will do as you please; I shall simply pursue the straightforward path before me towards Macon. I shall endeavour, and, I trust, with success, to find your sister, and shall convey her immediately to the court of the king, with all the tenderness, affection, care, and delicacy of a brother. Now, as I said before, you will act as you please; I go on my way, and say not one word more upon the subject."

"I will take care you shall not say one word more to me," replied Henry de Brienne. "But yet the matter ends not here; we shall meet again ere long. If you follow that path, I follow this." So saying, he turned at once into a road, the entrance of which they had been approaching, and which led into a deep wood, extending down to the very banks of the Ain. He took no farther leave, nor looked behind him, but galloped on at full speed, leaving his companion gazing after him in anger, surprise, and grief.

After pausing for a moment, Bernard turned towards the servant, who had drawn up his horse a step behind, and who, having heard angry words, and marked angry gestures, between his master and one whom he knew to be the friend of his earliest years, seemed scarcely less surprised than the young cavalier himself. All that had taken place was so unexpected, so strange, so unaccountable, that Bernard de Rohan felt confused and bewildered, and remained a moment without speaking. "Good Heaven!" he said to himself, at length, "is old affection to be treated thus?" and then, raising his voice, he added to the man, "Wait here till I come back."

At the same moment he put spurs to his horse, and rode after Henry de Brienne at full speed, resolved to endeavour once more to sooth and reason with him, and do much rather than suffer him to depart in such a frame of mind. Happy had it been for him, happy for all concerned, had he refrained. He did not again make his appearance for three quarters of an hour, or perhaps more; and the servant, alarmed by all he had witnessed,

rode some short way into the wood. There, however, he met his master returning. Bernard de Rohan was on foot, leading his horse, his countenance pale and somewhat haggard, his handkerchief bound round his hand, and some drops of blood upon his sleeve and collar. As soon as he saw the servant, he sprang upon his horse again, rode on without speaking, and once more resumed the high road.

CHAPTER II.

The court was still at Fontainebleau; and Isabel de Brienne sat in a lonely chamber of the chateau, gazing forth, with a fair and an animated scene before her eyes, but without taking any note of the calm face of nature, or of the many moving objects that flitted across the view. Those eyes, indeed, were dimmed with tears, which, though several days had now elapsed since the heavy grief that weighed her down had fallen upon her heart, had not ceased to flow, from time to time, when she thought of him who was gone, and called up the memories of the past. Let us love as we may, let us enjoy the society of those to whom our heart is given as much as it is possible, there will be still—from the touch of earth in all our affections—something which renders the memory of love, when fate has severed the tie, more sweet, more intense, than even while its mortal course was running. Perhaps it is, that—as when we are removed at some distance from beautiful things, we see them better than when we are in the midst of them—perhaps it is, that when the moments of enjoyment are passed, we feel them collectively rather than separately, and that the whole of our happiness, when gone, gathered together by recollection, is more powerfully and duly estimated than when scattered over the pathway of many hours.

Be it what it may, it seemed to Isabel de Brienne that her love for Bernard de Rohan had increased rather than diminished by his death; that the happiness which she had enjoyed in his society was greater than she had imagined it to be; that the necessity of that society to

her heart was more absolutely imperative than she had believed it; that to her there was nothing that could supply its place; that without it, life was more arid than a desert.

She sat and wept, then, but silently and quietly; for, although the cause of her tears still continued, that which first occasioned them to flow was in the past. No new bitterness had been added to her situation by anything which took place around her. Every one was kind to her, every one seemed to compassionate her. The king himself had seen her more than once, and had spoken to her with all tenderness. His daughter, the Princess Claude, had devoted herself to sooth her. Even Catharine de Medicis, who, notwithstanding her strong courage and masculine mind, had a touch of every human passion in her nature, the softer as well as the fiercer, had used her gently and kindly, and done all that she could to prevent anything from being importunate to her in her affliction. She had never been called upon to appear at the court. She had been left undisturbed in that solitude which could alone calm her grief; and, if anything was said or done to win her from her sorrow, it was quietly and delicately; for there was something in her very manner and tone which impressed all those around her with the certainty that she did not either exaggerate the grief that she felt, or encourage it to endure longer than its appointed time.

On the present occasion, however, she had not sat long alone; for the Princess Claude had not left her more than half an hour when she received a summons to the presence of the king; and, descending to the story of the castle immediately below that which she inhabited, she found Henry himself, with the dauphin, his young daughter Marguerite, and one or two others of the highest personages attached to the court. The moment she entered, Henry advanced to meet her; and, taking her by the hand, said, in a low and gentle voice, "I have sent for you, fair lady, because I think that the time is come when you must make an effort to shake off this grief, and, in some degree, to mingle with the world again."

"Sire," replied she, in a quiet but firm tone, "I have no wish ever to mingle with the world again. The purpose which I mentioned to your majesty, of retiring into a convent as speedily as possible, remains not only

unshaken, but, on the contrary, confirmed by thought and calm reflection. Last night I had a letter from my mother, fully approving of my intention; and this morning I had an interview of some length with my Lord of Masseran, who rather confirms than opposes my purpose. He told me that his stay was prolonged here by order of your majesty; and I was not without hopes that it was for the purpose of making such arrangements as might be requisite for my permanent retirement from the world."

"No, no," replied the king, "my views in detaining him were far different. I cannot abandon the hope that your feelings in these respects will change; and I must require of you to remain some time longer here, and to make an effort to mingle in the more tranquil society of this place."

"Oh, sire," exclaimed Isabel, "do not, do not force me so to do."

"Nay," said the king, gravely, "I must exact it of you. From the larger assemblies of the court you shall be exempt, but on ordinary occasions I must request that you will be present. I have now some important business to transact, but I beg you to remain here till my return."

Thus saying, the king departed, and Isabel remained standing where he had left her. She felt that she must obey; but, at that moment, though accustomed to courts, though full of grace, and possessing, in general, that calm tranquillity of mind which enables one, in all ordinary circumstances, to act with dignity and calmness, she could willingly have sunk into the earth at once, to avoid the aggravation of all she felt by the number of human eyes upon her. It endured but for a moment, however; for the dauphin immediately advanced to her side, saying, "Let me lead you to a seat, fair lady. Here is one beside my sister Marguerite;" and, as he led her on, he added, in a lower voice, "Be comforted, be comforted. Perchance things may not be so bad as they seem."

Isabel shook her head with a melancholy look. "He knows not the history," she said to herself; but, somewhat reassured by his kindness, she suffered him to lead her on, and took the seat by the princess, who greeted her with a kindly smile. For some minutes, of course, she continued an object of attention, and it was easy

for her to perceive that her history and her situation gave a topic to many persons there present. Gradually, however, the subject lost its interest with its newness. People came and went. Several of the royal family spoke to her with kindness and attention. Marguerite, with those kindly feelings which she never lost, even with the loss of other good qualities, applied herself with more skill than so young a person might have been supposed to possess, to occupy her fair companion's thoughts; and Isabel was becoming somewhat reconciled to the scene, when a person entered, the sight of whom once more threw her into distress and agitation.

That person was the Count de Meyrand; and, after speaking to the higher personages in the room, he advanced directly towards her. The sight of the count, as we have said, agitated and distressed her; but it was not the sight alone that gave her the greatest pain. His appearance in that saloon, and in the private circle of the royal family, was enough to show her at once, both that he had not ceased his pursuit, and that he followed it with the approbation and countenance of the king. Such a conviction was indeed terrible to her, and drove her almost to despair.

Little did the Count de Meyrand know the sensations which at that moment were busy in her bosom; the feelings of abhorrence and disgust with which his whole conduct had inspired her; the determination which instantly seized her, to lose no time in throwing herself at the king's feet, and beseeching him to spare her the misery of any farther suit from one she so thoroughly detested and despised. The count's demeanour, however, was very different from that which she expected; and certainly, had it been possible for Isabel to be deceived in regard to his past conduct, or to feel towards him any other sensation but that of dislike and reprobation, his behaviour on the present occasion might have made some way to regain her esteem.

He approached her, then, with a grave and even melancholy aspect; and, bowing first to the Princess Marguerite, he then turned to Isabel, and said, in a tone not exactly low and private, but still somewhat beneath that of the ordinary conversation that was going on, "I grieve to see you looking ill in health as well as at heart, Mademoiselle de Brienne. But I can assure you that I share your sorrow for one who—nay, do not make

so impatient a gesture: I beseech you remember that we were friends before we were rivals, and that such old feelings are not easily shaken off."

Isabel's eyes filled with tears, but she remained silent, and mastered them, though, at the same time, Marguerite, perhaps acting by directions she had previously received, made room for the count to stand between herself and Isabel, and, turning away her head, talked to her little brother Henry.

The count did not lose the opportunity, and endeavoured, for more than an hour, to draw Isabel into conversation. He found the effort vain, however: she remained silent and reserved; the very presence of one bitterly connected by memory with the death of him she loved being in itself sufficient to take from her all power and inclination to converse. When forced to answer, she did so shortly, generally by a monosyllable; and if, as was twice the case, the count approached the subject which was certainly uppermost in the thoughts of both, she replied in terms which made him leave it again instantly.

At length the king himself returned, and, if one might judge by his countenance, the business which he had been transacting was of no very pleasant nature; his brow was heavy and contracted, and his cheek a little flushed; but such signs of anger were already dying away when he entered, and were soon mastered entirely. Among the first he spoke to was the Count de Meyrand, and he did so familiarly, though with a grave air. He was accompanied by the Maréchal de Vieilleville, who, while the monarch was thus noticing Monsieur de Meyrand, addressed a few words to Isabel in a kindly tone, and glanced his eye, but certainly with no very friendly expression, towards the count.

The thought at that moment struck Isabel of engaging Monsieur de Vieilleville to assist her in her views. He had shown himself extremely kind towards her since her arrival, and his daughter, who was in attendance upon the Princess Claude, had been her greatest comfort. She resolved, then, to speak to him at once, and the opportunity was favourable. No eyes were at that moment upon them; the king was speaking to the Count de Meyrand, and his right shoulder turned towards her; and, instead of replying to the courteous inquiries of the maréchal, she said, "Oh, Monsieur de Vieilleville, I be-

seech you to obtain for me an audience of the king as speedily as may be; and, if you would be yourself present also, to give me your support with his majesty, I should feel some hope; for, in truth"—and she turned her eyes for an instant towards the Count de Meyrand —"for, in truth, if this is to continue, my heart will break."

"I fear it cannot be before to-morrow morning," replied Vieilleville, "for his majesty is almost immediately going out to ride, and there is more than sufficient business for this evening already accumulated."

"Then let it be as early as possible," said Isabel; "and oh, give me your voice and assistance, Monsieur de Vieilleville, I beseech you."

The meréchal could not reply, for at that moment the king turned towards them, saying to the Count de Meyrand in conclusion, "Be here, at all events, Monsieur de Meyrand, towards midday to-morrow, as I think I may have something of importance to say to you."

The count bowed low, and promised to obey; and Henry, addressing Isabel, with that courteous hypocrisy which may be an evil, but is a pleasant one, thanked her for having kindly stayed and mingled with his court, although he knew well that the fair unhappy girl had no choice but to yield to the commands she had received. The king, indeed, meant it kindly, and she felt that it was so; but the heart, under the effect of deep grief, is like a fine-strung instrument, from which the lightest touch brings forth a sound, and a careless hand often, in seeking to awake more cheerful notes, strikes accidentally upon some inharmonious tone, which turns the whole to discord.

Henry saw the bright drops swimming between the dark lashes, but, knowing that a word more might make them overflow, he left her to speak to some one else, and shortly afterward the party separated.

Isabel retired to her own chamber, and for an hour or two afterward was left to repose. She saw from the windows, at which she placed herself, the gay cavalcade of Henry and his courtiers ride away into the forest. She perceived many a group moving hither and thither. She heard the sound of horns and the cry of dogs, and, in her loneliness, it seemed to her that all human things became more and more distasteful to her every moment.

It was at that unpropitious time that the tapestry over

the door was pushed back, and, equally to her surprise and indignation, she beheld the Count de Meyrand. She gazed at him in silence for a moment as he came in, dropped the tapestry, and advanced towards her. But, although it was clear he saw how distasteful his visit was, he neither hesitated nor apologized, but, proceeding without pause to the place where she sat, he bent his knee to the ground, with an air of deep grief and anxiety, saying, "I come alone, Mademoiselle de Brienne, to beseech your pardon for all that I have done amiss, to entreat you to forgive all the pain I have caused you, to acknowledge that I have been wrong, very wrong, in many things that I have done."

"Such acknowledgments, sir," replied Isabel, in a cold tone, "may be a relief to your own heart, but I neither require nor wish for them. As to forgiveness, I do forgive you from my soul, as I do everybody else who has acted the part of a bitter enemy towards me."

"Oh, call me not so! call me not so!" he exclaimed, vehemently. "Call me not an enemy, when I have been actuated throughout by the deepest, the strongest, the most passionate love! Oh, Isabel, if you could tell what I have suffered; if, in the cold composure of your own well-regulated feelings, you could conceive what ardent and intense passion is; if, in short, you knew love as love appears when he masters a strong human heart, you would comprehend, you would find excuses for the madness, if I may so call it, of my late conduct; you would conceive how and why I was driven to use every means in order to obtain the hand of her I loved. You would comprehend it, I say, you would find excuses for it, you would pardon, you would pity it. Nay, do not rise, lady—how have I offended now?"

"By mentioning, sir," replied Isabel, "love that can never be returned, on which I have again and again besought you not to speak, which is an insult to the widowed affections of my heart; love, which has not produced the fruits of love, but has borne a bitterer harvest than the darkest enmity could have produced. I must insist that you leave me, or I will call for those who, in this place at least, are ready to ensure me protection."

"Nay," said the count, detaining her gently by the hand, "I beseech you remain; I myself will go in one moment. It was not my purpose, when I came here, to speak to you of that love: your words called forth,

whether I would or not, those feelings which I would fain have kept imprisoned in my heart. I will not offend again. I came to assure you that my conduct shall be changed, that I am bitterly grieved for the past, and that I will give you no farther occasion whatsoever to view me in any other light than that of a sincere friend, if you will grant me forgiveness, and prove the sincerity of that forgiveness by laying aside the cold and repulsive demeanour which you displayed towards me a few hours ago, by suffering me to approach you even as a common acquaintance, by permitting me to hear the tones of your voice, sometimes to win a smile from your lips, and by granting that I be no longer to be excluded from that happiness which is afforded to every one who knows you, on account of the deep, intense, and unchangeable affection which you have inspired; affection which, as you see, has changed my character, wakened me out of that indifference which I fancied was an inherent part of my nature, and made me as vehement and eager as a boy."

"All this, sir," said Isabel, "is very useless, and I must beg you to leave me. I am glad that you repent of evil that you have done. I hope that your repentance is sincere. I forgive you the pain that you have inflicted on me with all my heart; but all that I can promise is, that my conduct towards you, when we meet accidentally, will be regulated by yours towards me. If, as you say, you give me no farther occasion either for offence or for anxiety regarding your purposes, I will refrain from showing towards you those feelings which your previous behaviour might well inspire; but the moment that you insult me, after what has passed, with one word upon the subject of those wishes which have brought so much misery upon me, that instant I regard you and treat you as the bitterest enemy that fate has ever sent me. Now, sir, let me beseech you to leave me, for I cannot hear one word more upon these matters."

The count saw that she was determined, and withdrew, renewing the assurances he had given; but in the antechamber he paused again, looking bitterly down upon the ground. "Will it succeed?" he muttered to himself. "Will it succeed? She seems as obdurate as iron. I doubt it much, even with the king's aid."

He moved two or three steps farther on, and, quitting

the antechamber, entered one of the long galleries of the palace, one side of which was pierced by manifold tall windows, throwing a bright and checkered light across. There he paused again, and mused for several minutes; but, while he did so, another man entered the gallery from the opposite end, and approached him with that calm and stealthy step, which does not proclaim its own advance by the sound of any footfall.

At length a shadow crossing the light made the count look up, exclaiming, "Ha, my Lord of Masseran! The very man I could have wished to see."

"Not more than I wished to see the Count de Meyrand," replied the Lord of Masseran, with a sweet smile. "I have not heard what progress you have made during the day. I only know that you have had opportunity."

"Which has proved not a little fruitless," replied the count. "I saw her at the court this morning, as you know, but she was ice itself. I watched my opportunity, however, this afternoon, and have now seen her alone. According to your hint, I assured her that I repented heartily of the past, promised to give no more occasion of offence, besought her only to endure my presence and acquaintance with common courtesy, and—"

"But did you let her see that you loved her still?" demanded the Lord of Masseran. "Did you tell her how passionately you loved her? Did you tell her—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the count, "I told her all that, and more than that; I spoke vehemently and eagerly, for, by Heaven, there I spoke but the truth."

"But what did she say?" demanded his counsellor. "Did she yield? Did she reply favourably?"

"Not she," answered the count. "She spoke, indeed, an icy forgiveness, in harsh and chilling words. But when I would have talked to her somewhat more of my passion, when I would have laid all that I have done amiss upon the fiery love which she had inspired, she rose in anger to call her people round her; and, though I soothed and tried to quiet her, yet all I could gain was a repetition of the same cold forgiveness, and a promise to shape her conduct according to mine, with a menace if I ever mentioned love to her again."

"And what would you have more, my dear count?" demanded the Lord of Masseran, with a meaning smile. "Shape her conduct to yours! Ha, ha, ha! Why then you know well how to shape your own. Be gentle with

her for a day or two, then press her warmly and more warmly. By my life, you will find such sins more and more easily forgiven each day. Offend her with love in the morning, then kneel at her feet and crave pardon, bedewing her hand with tears half the evening, and brush away the tears with kisses, and be again forgiven. Is woman's heart so new a study to you, count, as not to know that whenever she tells you what you are not to do, she tells, in fact, what it is you are to do; and that, in affairs of the heart, a woman's words are to be interpreted, like morning dreams, reversedly!"

"Perhaps you are right," replied the Count de Meyrand; "for the truth is this, my good lord, that a man in matters of love is like a gamester: so long as he plays coolly and indifferently, his skill and his experience have their effect; but if once he gets deeply excited and interested, he sees nothing but the object before him, and loses the advantages which present themselves."

"At all events," said the Lord of Masseran, "you have obtained one advantage, and, even while you fancied you were not successful, have been more successful than I could have anticipated. Instead of shunning you, and cutting you off from all opportunity of urging your suit, she now agrees to meet you with courtesy as an acquaintance. It will be your own fault if you are not soon received with regard as a friend, and yielded to with affection as a lover. I am going to visit her even now myself, and I will not fail to aid your pursuit. But you must remember," he added, with a laugh, "if you succeed, you must build me up again that tower, which by its fall did us such good service."

"If I succeed, I will build you a dozen castles," answered the Count de Meyrand; "and why should I not succeed? She is but a woman, and they are all alike."

With these words they parted; and the Lord of Masseran pursued his way to the chamber where the Count de Meyrand had left Isabel de Brienne. Thither we must follow him, in order to see how far his words to the count corresponded with his actions. After pausing for a moment in the antechamber to think, he entered with a quick step, as if in great haste and eagerness; and, approaching Isabel, he said—addressing her, as he usually did, without any of that tone of familiar intimacy which the near connexion existing between them might have produced—"I have just met the Count de Mey-

rand, and I fear, mademoiselle, that he has been intruding upon you, and causing you pain?"

"He has, indeed, my lord," replied Isabel. "But he has promised me most faithfully to abstain from doing so for the future; and, in fact, to give me no farther cause of any kind for offence."

The Lord of Masseran's lip curled into a sneer, and for a moment or two he purposely made no reply. "If you are satisfied with such an assurance," he answered, at length, "I have no reason to be dissatisfied; for, of course, it tends to what I have always wished: that you should give him your hand."

Isabel gazed in his face for a moment with a look of surprise and horror. "What do you mean?" she asked, at length.

"Simply," replied the Lord of Masseran, "that the Count de Meyrand is now in the right course, and must succeed. He was in the wrong course long enough, and so obstinate therein that he wellnigh ruined me as well as himself."

"I do not understand you," replied Isabel, impatiently. "How did he wellnigh ruin you, my lord? Me he has certainly rendered most unhappy."

"He has wellnigh ruined me," replied the Lord of Masseran, "by inducing me to do a thousand things in favour of his love for you which I never else should have thought of. You cannot suppose, for one moment, that all those strange and dangerous schemes which he pursued were mine. I had no interest in the matter, and can prove at any time that everything was done at his suggestion."

Isabel cast down her eyes in thought; and the Lord of Masseran, feeling that she might have some difficulty in believing him to be so soft and easy in disposition as to be led to anything without strong motives, added, in a low tone, "He had me in some degree in his power, it is true, and I could not refuse. Otherwise I never would have consented."

"May I ask, my lord," said Isabel, looking up in his face, "what it was you meant just now when you said that the count was in the right course, and must succeed."

The Lord of Masseran's countenance, which had before been grave, now assumed a quiet smile, and he replied, "I meant that he was in a course of that gentle-

ness and soothing courtesy which wins without striving. Who ever saw a fowler rush upon his prey like a lion? he rather creeps quietly up, and takes it by surprise; and so must man do with woman's heart. Besides, there is power and influence with him, which you cannot well resist. Though the king would not force your inclination, Meyrand has his full countenance in seeking your hand, and probably has been advised by him—for no one is more skilled in such matters than Henry—to affect moderation. Perhaps the king sees that, at heart, you are not disposed towards a convent; and he will therefore keep the matter going on for a month or two, till a little decent time elapses, after which he will, with a gentle and kindly use of his authority, make Meyrand happy with your hand. Meyrand, in the mean time, will treat you tenderly and softly, I am sure; will not urge you at first, but will go gently from the friend into the lover; and then you will find him ardent enough, no doubt."

Isabel had turned deadly pale as the Lord of Masseran spoke: her breath seemed to come with difficulty; and at length, waving her hand to stop him from going on, she said, with a great effort, "I am faint, my lord—I pray you send my women—another time, when I am better."

The Lord of Masseran, seeing that what he had said had produced fully the effect he intended, hurried from the room, as if in great fear and anxiety, to call some of the female attendants to Isabel's assistance. They went to her in haste, and found her sunk from her chair upon the floor. She had not absolutely fainted; and, when they raised her, she burst into a convulsive fit of tears, which for the time relieved her.

"There is no time to be lost," she said to herself when she had somewhat recovered; and, although the women attempted to dissuade her from making the effort, she succeeded in writing a few lines to the Maréchal de Vieilleville, beseeching him not to fail in asking an audience for her of the king at as early an hour as possible. "I will leave no doubt of my wishes," said Isabel to herself; "and this is a request which has never yet been denied."

CHAPTER III.

The king was speaking to the Dauphin Francis as Isabel, conducted by the Maréchal de Vieilleville, entered the royal cabinet at the hour of nine in the morning of the following day. The prince was standing near the door unbonneted, but had apparently asked his father some final question ere he left the room, to which Henry replied, "On no account! Lay my commands upon him, Francis. He is in the king's hand, and none shall judge but myself. Farther, do as I bade you."

The dauphin bowed his head and withdrew; and Henry, turning to Isabel de Brienne, welcomed her with a gracious smile, which gave her good hope of a favourable audience.

"Your good friend here, Monsieur de Vieilleville," said the king, "has told me, fair lady, that you wish to speak with me on matters of much importance. I had hoped that we had already concluded so much of your business that the rest might stand over till both you and I had thought maturely of the matter. However, as you wish it, and as I have now an hour to spare, I am ready to give you full attention."

"Your majesty is most gracious," replied Isabel, "and ever has been most gracious to me; but I trust that you will hear me patiently, and grant me a request which has never yet, I believe, been denied to any lady of the realm who was disposed to ask it."

"Nay, nay," said the king, interrupting her, "not that request again! For your own sake I would have you think over it for at least a month or two; and for the sake of another also who loves you well, I would have you not only think over it, but abandon it altogether."

The king spoke with a smile; but Isabel de Brienne replied gravely and sadly, "I beseech your majesty call it not loving me well. He may love much, but he loves much amiss; and it is his conduct, and the evident hopes that he entertains, which makes me the more eager, by putting the final barrier between myself and the world for ever, to escape from his persecution, or, at all events, to convince him that his expectations are vain."

"Nay, you are too severe," said the king. "What has he done so deeply to offend you? He has but sought, as any man might well seek, to obtain a treasure which was withheld from him."

"I know not well, sire," replied Isabel, whose generous spirit was roused at what she judged the defence of guilt, "I know not what is the code of honour among men. It seems to me that they often fight and spill each other's blood because they are accused of dishonourable acts, which yet they commit every day. I know not whether the dishonour should lie in doing the wrong, or being told that we have done it. Methinks in the former; and, if so, when Monsieur de Meyrand betrayed, deceived, and falsified the truth to his friend, he was doing no very honourable act. I beseech your majesty to pardon my boldness, but you ask me, sire, what great cause of offence he has given me. In the tale I lately told your majesty I mentioned many an offence—many that I consider dark, ungentlemanly, and dishonest deeds; and, if I could fancy that the fault was in me and in any idle beauty my face or person may possess, rather than in him and the corruption of his own heart, I should hate myself as a sharer in things that I condemn and despise. As to offences towards me in all these disgraceful acts I speak of, I forgive them freely; but Heaven forbid that I should wed the man who has committed them; for, as I must ever despise him, I could never love him. Let your majesty but recollect what he has done, and what I have suffered from him;" and she calmly and deliberately recapitulated all that she had observed or knew of the conduct of the Count de Meyrand.

She remarked that, while she was speaking, the king took notes of what she said regarding the count; and, when she had ended that matter, she added, "I beseech your majesty to remember I am not making an accusation, or asking any punishment upon this gentleman. I have said I forgive him; and when I do so, it is without reserve; but I only beseech your majesty to take my case into your gracious consideration, and to suffer me to retire at once into any convent you may please to name; for if it were your royal will that, while at your court, I should be exposed to what I underwent yesterday, my heart would break with the misery it suffered, and the grave would be the cell which gave me repose."

"I grieve, my dear young lady," said the king in reply, "not only that Meyrand is so distasteful to you, but that he has, as I must own, given you good cause to view his conduct with disapprobation. However, I will not press him upon you, and therefore there can be no reason why you should not remain at the court. Why—if exempt from his pursuit—why should you fly from us, and bury all your charms and graces in a dull convent? There are thousands of noble gentlemen in France who would give half their heritage for one smile from that sweet lip. These convents rob us of half our loveliest dames; and, good faith, like that luxurious monster, my namesake the Eighth of England, I have a great mind to suppress all the monasteries and nunneries in the realm. By Heaven, I hate these convents."

"Oh, say not so, sire, say not so," said Isabel. "They are the refuge of many a wrung and broken heart. They are the places where the sweet secret tears of blasted affection may be best poured forth. They are the sanctuaries of that holy grief which God gives man to wean him from the earth. There, too, Remorse may hide his trembling head, and Penitence and Prayer call down Hope from Heaven. Ah, no, we may hate the abuse of them, sire, but I now feel myself that in every land there is a need of some place set apart to solitude."

"I will not reason with you on the policy of such things," said the king, smiling; "but one result is very necessary to guard against—the natural instability of human resolutions: and there is no such effectual way of so doing, as to give time for forming those resolutions, and considering them properly before they are made irrevocable. The law requires a year of probation, and so far does its duty; but, in regard to those whom we esteem and love, we require other and better trials of the resolve before we even permit that year of probation to begin; for we well know the means used during novitiate to prevent all retraction. Thus must I still return to my point—putting the Count de Meyrand out of the question—there are, as I have said, a thousand other noble gentlemen in France ready to enter the lists as aspirants to this fair hand. Surely, out of them all, you may choose some one who may make you happy and be happy with you; and I wish you to pause, reflect, and judge before you decide. Time will

heal the wounds from which you now suffer, and we may soon see you a bright and happy bride."

"Never, your majesty," replied Isabel, firmly. "I can assure you, you mistake me. I have no heart to give, and without it I will never give my hand. Had my father plighted me to one I did not know—one who, after the acquaintance of a day, and the exchange of half a dozen words, was destined to be my husband, without farther knowledge or inclination on my part—the case might be as your majesty supposes; but loving and having beloved, from infancy until now, a man whom my father chose because he knew that he would possess my affection and ever make me happy, my spirit is widowed, and my heart is buried in the grave of him I loved. I do beseech your majesty, by everything that may move you, to grant my prayer, and let me seek the only shelter where I can hope for repose and peace."

"Well," said the king, dipping the pen in the ink, with a smile and a shake of the head, as if he still doubted, "well, fair Isabel, if it must be so, I will yield. Yet still, once more let me ask you, are you fixed and determined? Recollect the changes that time works in human resolutions. If there can be satisfactory proof given that this Count of Meyrand was really a sharer in the acts that you mention, so far from favouring his suit, I will banish him from the court as long as you remain in it. If, therefore, it is on that account you fear, put him entirely out of the question, and then think whether, with the course of time, your grief may not be softened down, your heart opened to new sensations, and your affections find a worthy successor to him whom you have lost. Urge her, De Vieilleville, to consider this."

"It is of no use, my lord," replied Isabel, somewhat mortified at seeing a smile still upon the king's countenance, as if he thought that her resolution was affected; "it is of no use. If any voice could move me, it would, of course, be that of your majesty; but my purpose is fixed, and I do assure you most solemnly that my hand shall never be given to any man upon this earth! To this I pledge myself beyond all recall."

"Nay, then," answered Henry, "if that be the case, I have nothing to do but yield my consent;" and, after writing for a few moments on a paper that lay before him, he took it up and read, "I do hereby signify my full con-

sent and permission that Isabel, demoiselle de Brienne, shall enter into any convent or community of regular nuns or canonesses that she may think fit to choose, having fulfilled the novitiate, and all preparatory rules and regulations as established by the law of the land, and the forms and ordinances of the community selected."

Still, however, he held the paper in his hand, saying, "Nevertheless, I do not like to give it."

"I beseech you, sire, to do so," said Isabel, who at that moment looked to the possession of that paper as her great hope of peace and tranquillity through life.

"Nay, wait one moment," said the king: "there is a gentleman for whom I have a high esteem, of great rank and consideration, a member of one of the most noble and princely families of France—some branches of which, indeed, are allied to our royal house—handsome, gallant, and so captivating in demeanour, that I cannot fancy any lady's heart long resisting persuasion such as his. I recollect, in days long gone, to have seen in his eyes no light admiration when the fair Isabel de Brienne passed by, and I do believe he would consider himself the happiest man in France if he could move her from this passion for a nunnery. I will but—"

"Nay, nay, I beseech you, sire!" cried Isabel, throwing herself upon her knees before him. "Oh, spare me! spare me!" But Henry gently disengaged the hand which she had taken to detain him, and, passing by, left the cabinet.

Isabel wrung her hands: "Oh, my lord!" she said, turning to Monsieur de Vieilleville, "this is a new misery the king is bringing on me."

De Vieilleville soothed her, assured her that the king meant kindly by her, and would not urge her beyond a certain point; but he kept that sort of grave and serious countenance which made her feel that such topics of consolation, though suggested to calm her, might not be believed, even by himself. Her heart beat with anxiety and apprehension, and she could scarcely keep the tears from falling over her cheeks, when she heard the steps of Henry and some one else again approaching the cabinet. It cost her a terrible struggle with her own heart to master her emotions, and to summon resolution sufficient to think briefly over her situation, and how she should behave. Before she could determine anything

more than the mere general purpose of again and again expressing her resolution, in as strong language as she could use, the door of the cabinet opened. Her back was still turned towards it, her eyes bent upon the ground, as if to avoid seeing the person thus brought to importune her sorrowful heart for love it could not give, and she only drew a step aside to afford the monarch room to pass at once to his chair.

As he did pass, however, there was another hand laid upon her arm, and the voice of some one beside her said "Isabel!"

She started back—turned towards him—lifted her eyes—and with a loud scream, before any one could catch her, fell senseless on the floor.

"Good Heaven, I have carried this too far!" exclaimed the king, starting forward, and aiding with his own hands to raise her head.

"She is only fainting, your majesty," said Vieilleville; "I will run and call your physician to her."

"No, no!" said the king; "bring some water, but do not mention what has occurred. We have many matters to deal with, and must do it carefully. See, she begins to revive."

When Isabel de Brienne opened her eyes again, the first face she saw was that of Bernard de Rohan; and her first greeting on her return to consciousness was the warm kiss of deep and pure affection. She was still lying on the floor, with her head propped by cushions of purple velvet, and her shoulders supported by Bernard's left arm, while with his right hand he clasped hers tenderly.

We need not pause upon the meeting. We need not pause upon the feelings that were excited in the bosoms of either; upon the words that were spoken as soon as Isabel recovered the power of utterance; or upon the overpowering joy, which repaid her for all that she had suffered. It often happens with us in life, that we know not the intensity of our own affections till they are severely tried. Love, ay, and even sometimes hate, will lie slumbering at the bottom of the heart with very little apparent power, till something rouses the genius or the fiend, and he starts up, armed with more than gigantic power. Isabel had now learned how deeply she loved; and, although Bernard de Rohan had ever found her full of the tenderness, the sweetness, the devotion of affec-

tion, it was not till this moment that he was met with all the open ardour and intensity of feeling which he himself experienced towards her. She hung upon the bosom of him whom she had fancied lost to her for ever. She gazed with deep affection in his eyes. She hid her face upon his shoulder and wept. All, all the signs and tokens of joy and love that human nature can display, from smiles to tears, were given as his welcome back from death to life—and he was very happy.

They were alone when Isabel first recovered; for Henry's kindly heart had made him draw away the Maréchal de Vieilleville when he saw consciousness returning, in order to leave the lovers for a short space alone. In a few minutes, however, the king came back, and, seating himself at the table, he gazed with a smile upon Isabel, saying, "Now, my rash young lady, here is the king's permission for you to enter whatsoever convent you think fit. Your resolution, you said, was unchangeable. You vowed that you would never give your hand to any man in life. What am I to think now?"

Isabel looked down for a moment, and then raising her eyes with a smile, even while the warm blood mantled in her cheek, she replied, "I have given him my hand already, your majesty."

A slight frown came upon the king's brow; and, with the quickened perception of love, Isabel saw in a moment that she might rouse in Henry's heart the lion of authority to oppose her own wishes if she spoke of the marriage between her and Bernard de Rohan being lawful, notwithstanding the royal edict. She added, therefore, the next moment, "I trust, sire, that your majesty's consent in this case may be obtained more easily than on the occasion of my late petition, which I now withdraw."

"Well and rightly spoken, fair lady," said the king, his good-humour at once returning. "I have some chiding to give you, baron," he added, addressing Bernard de Rohan, "for having ventured clandestinely, and without lawful sanction, to unite yourself to this young lady by a marriage which, as you now well know, is null and void. For that fault, however, you shall receive pardon, in consideration of your good services in Piedmont; and your claim to her hand shall have favourable consideration."

Bernard de Rohan, perhaps, might not feel so well in-

clined as Isabel to bow the head to the king's will; but there was no resource, and he submitted, though not without attempting to justify himself. "I trust to your majesty's gracious favour," he said, "to make me at length happy, after enduring so much as I have endured; but I beseech you to consider that the act which I ventured to do was not altogether so unjustifiable as it may have been represented. From all that I saw of the Lord of Masseran; from all that Monsieur de Brissac communicated to me concerning his doubtful faith towards your majesty; from all that Isabel herself told me of his plans and purposes, I judged, perhaps wrongly, that not a moment's time was to be lost in freeing her from the restraint in which she was held. No possible means existed of so doing except by aiding her to escape and flying with her. To have done so without being able to call her my wife might have subjected her to unjust and evil imputations. I had her father's full and written consent. Her mother had known of that consent being given, and had never raised her voice against it. I therefore might fairly conceive that I had the approbation of both her parents. It was our intention, I most solemnly assure your majesty, so far from treating your authority with any disrespect, to hasten to your court with all speed, for the purpose of casting ourselves at your feet, and beseeching your approval. In these circumstances I trust that you will grant us your gracious pardon, and, with the same generous kindness which you have displayed in bringing us together again so soon, will confirm, by your royal will, the union in which we ventured to engage."

"God loves the free giver, my good young friend," replied the king; "and, although there is in human nature a propensity to enhance the favours that we have it in our power to confer, by exciting anxiety and impatience even in those to whom we wish well by affecting delay and hesitation, yet would I not do so in the present case were it possible to grant your request. The edict by which all such marriages are annulled has become the law of the land; and laws are too solemn things to be played with, to be enacted one day, revoked, altered, amended another, as ignorance and stupidity may have created defects in their original state, or as caprice and vacillation may cause a change of opinion afterward. This law was long thought of, and

promulgated with reluctance upon the show of absolute necessity. Such being the case, you must consider your marriage as null; but as I do sincerely believe that in contracting it you had no thought of offence, and as the will of this young lady's father, joined with her own affection and her brother's consent, must overbear what seems the unreasonable opposition of her mother, your marriage shall take place with all speed, and with my full consent and approbation. In the mean time, Monsieur de Rohan, you are our guest at Fontainebleau; and when I place the honour of this fair lady in your good charge and keeping, I know that I trust to a rock which is not to be shaken."

Bernard and Isabel kissed the king's hand with deep gratitude for the kindness that he showed them, and were about to retire, when a page entered, saying, "The Count de Meyrand, sire, waits without, according to your commands of yesterday."

The eyes of Bernard de Rohan blazed in a moment. "I do beseech your majesty," he said, "to let me deal with that most dishonest man according to the usages and customs of gentlemen and soldiers."

Isabel, however, cast herself at the king's feet, saying, "Oh no, sire! no! Under the protection of your mighty arm, he can do us no farther harm. Bid Bernard forgive him, as I forgive him; and let not the hand that by your kindness is soon to be clasped in mine at the altar; let not that generous hand, which has never been stained with any but the blood of your majesty's enemies, be dyed with that of a fellow-subject!"

"She is right, Monsieur de Rohan. She is right," said the king, "and only entreats me to do what I had before determined. Of course, the dauphin gave you my message this morning before I saw you. By that you must abide, remembering that if, on any pretence whatsoever, you violate my commands, and draw your sword upon the Count de Meyrand, I retract the promise which I have made, and this lady's hand shall never be yours so long as I am King of France. To this I pledge my honour! I myself will deal with the Count de Meyrand. What he has done requires the chastisement of my prévôt rather than the chivalrous kind of punishment which you propose. I will not see him now, but some two hours hence, when my son and some others are present, I will inquire into his conduct, and may then sum-

mon you. For the time, retire with Monsieur de Vieille-ville to his apartments, where, as you may have much to say to one another, you may well spend an hour or two together."

The latter part of the king's directions Bernard de Rohan was very willing to obey; and, though his heart burned to chastise with his own arm the man who had betrayed him, yet the hand of Isabel was too precious a boon to be risked for such an object; and he knew that Henry was not one to forget the menace he had used, in case of disobedience.

CHAPTER IV.

As the chambers of the palace of Fontainebleau were then arranged, there was—between the great gallery and the audience-chamber in which the king, on ordinary occasions, received deputations, and other considerable bodies of people on business too numerous to be admitted to his cabinet—a large anteroom, with several doors, some leading to staircases, some to the great gallery, and some to other chambers as well as to the audience-hall. Across this anteroom the Count de Meyrand was pacing with a gloomy brow and a slow step, when he was met by the Lord of Masseran entering suddenly by a door which led from a back staircase. The brow of the latter was even darker than that of the count, but it bore more the aspect of terror than discontent; and his eyes, generally so calm and searching, now looked somewhat wild and astray, while his cheek was as pale as death. The instant he saw Meyrand he paused, as if he would fain have gone back; but the count's eyes were upon him, and the Savoyard, instantly reversing the impulse, advanced rapidly and grasped him by the hand.

"You seem agitated, Masseran," said the Count de Meyrand. "What is the matter? The king has just refused me an audience; things are not going well."

"Not going well?" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran. "By Heaven they are not, Monsieur de Meyrand! What is the matter? You, the lover of Isabel de Brienne, and

not know what is the matter! I should have thought that the very feeling of the air would have told you. It lies heavy upon my chest."

"How! is she ill!" demanded the count, eagerly. "Why look you so scared! Is she ill, I say!"

"Ill! Not she," exclaimed the Lord of Masseran. "She is well, too well! But I, for one, have keener perceptions when an enemy is near. I seem to feel it in the very air he breathes. Bernard de Rohan has come to life again. The tale they told us of his being crushed under the tower is false. Either he has done the thing himself to favour his own escape, or else the burning of that accursed tower has opened the way for him to fly."

The first impulse of the Count de Meyrand was to lay his hand upon the hilt of his sword, for he felt that there could be no longer any concealment, and that the rivalry between him and Bernard de Rohan must be one of life and death. The moment after, however, he drew his hand back quietly, as if ashamed of the emotion he displayed, and demanded, in a calm tone, "Pray where have you heard of all this! Where is this gallant chevalier! We must give him a warm reception."

"How did I hear of it!" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, impatient at the indifference which he knew to be affected. "My own eyes told me. Where is this gallant chevalier! In this very palace, not many hundred yards from this spot, seated by Isabel de Brienne, doubtless, for I saw them both passing towards the apartments of Vieilleville, with her hand clasped in his, and the old maréchal performing the office of Mercury, and doing the honours of Fontainebleau."

The fingers of the Count de Meyrand clasped tight into the palms of his hands, and he fixed his eyes upon the ground with a frowning brow. These, however, were the only signs of emotion that he suffered to appear; and he remained for some minutes without uttering a word, though the Lord of Masseran continued to gaze upon his countenance with a keen and inquiring air, which seemed to ask, "Have you nothing to suggest! Have you no plan to propose!"

"Come with me, Masseran," replied the Count de Meyrand, at length. "Come with me, and let us talk this matter over. It were sad to be foiled at this last moment."

"It were sad, indeed," murmured the Lord of Masseran, "when this very morning it seemed that the whole was in my hand, and it needed but a few hours to complete the work."

"Psha!" said the count, not much heeding what he said. "A few hours, a few days, a few weeks, or years, are nothing in the eye of fate. If we miss the precise moment, whether it be by a minute or a century, matters not, we have lost the great talisman for ever. Come with me. Let us consult and consider whether that moment is missed. The matter must soon be brought to a decision. Bernard de Rohan, in all probability, must be met and disposed of at the sword's point. That would vex me little; for, though he be a stout and skilful man at arms, there are others no less so than he, and I should never be unwilling, for a great prize, to risk an equal stake with any man. Young, rash-headed boys run into these encounters for mere sport, and risk life and all its joys for no great and probable object. With me, however, all these things are matters of calculation and of common sense, my good friend; and I would have brought it to the arbitrament of the sword long ago, if I had thought that the prize could be won by such means. But with a woman like Isabel de Brienne, to conquer in such mortal strife with him she loved would be to purchase hatred, not affection; to bar, not to open the way. Could I find means, not to kill him, but to overthrow, to cripple, to disgrace him, to make him beg his life at the sword's point, or by some other way to cast dishonour on his once bright name, that, indeed, might be more successful. Come with me, Masseran, come with me. You Italians are generally adepts at such things as these, and we must consider of the matter well."

Thus saying, he led the way to the apartments which had been assigned to the Lord of Masseran, and there remained closeted with his dark confederate till one of the king's pages came to summon him to the presence of Henry. By the time the boy entered the room where they sat, however, there had come a smile upon the countenance of Meyrand; and, rising with a graceful and a stately air, which he knew well how to assume, he followed through the gallery towards the audience-chamber. At the end of the corridor, the boy advanced across the anteroom which we have mentioned and

threw open the doors, and in a moment after the count stood in the presence of his sovereign.

Henry was seated at the upper end of the room, looking up towards the Duchess de Valentinois, who stood beside him on his right, while on the other hand appeared the dauphin and the Princess Claude. Near the duchess was Bernard de Rohan, with Isabel de Brienne, and Mademoiselle de Scepeaux, the daughter of the Maréchal de Vieilleville, while in other parts of the circle were one or two of the inferior ministers of the crown, and some of the most distinguished courtiers. The king was habited as he had been in the morning, that is to say, in black velvet, richly embroidered and laced with gold. But Bernard de Rohan was no longer in the riding-suit which he had previously worn; for, having procured garments from his own long-left dwelling, he appeared in all the splendour displayed by courtiers of that day, and well became the costly habit that he wore. Isabel de Brienne, too, had cast off the deep mourning she had assumed, and the lustre of her eyes, the varying colour of her cheek, the trembling smile that played in joyful agitation on her lip, all told that the mourning was gone from her heart also.

Each object on which the eye of the count rested added fire to the torture that he felt; but there was something in the sight of the Duchess of Valentinois, and in the position in which she stood between his rival and the king, that both pained and embarrassed him. During the last day or two he had remarked a change in her demeanour, and had perceived that she did not exert her influence zealously in his behalf; and the interview which had taken place between himself and her, on his late arrival in Paris, put his most private views almost entirely at her command, so that he would willingly have had her absent from the scene. By this time, however, he had made up his mind to the course he had to pursue; and the glimpse which the Lord of Masseran had caught of Bernard de Rohan had given the count the great advantage of coming to face his rival well prepared.

He advanced, then, into the midst of the circle, with his head erect, his eye clear, his countenance calm and untroubled, and, bowing with graceful ease to the king, he ran his eye over the rest of the circle, without flinching in the slightest degree beneath the stern gaze of

Bernard de Rohan, or the expectant and inquiring glances of the more indifferent spectators. When he had thus made his salutation, he was drawing a step back, as if to take his place at the end of the line, when Henry addressed him.

"Monsieur de Meyrand," said the king, "I have sent for you in regard to serious charges which have been made against you, and which it becomes you to answer both as a French gentleman, a soldier, and a man of honour. You have good reason to know that we regard you with some favour, and we trust to find, by the explanations you may give, that our favour was not really undeserved."

The king paused, as if expecting the count to reply; and Meyrand answered at once, without waiting to hear the charges, very willing to take the initiative upon himself.

"From those I see in your majesty's presence," he said, "and from the fraud of a reported death—spread for what purposes the parties themselves best know—I can easily divine the nature of the charges to which you, sire, allude, and am ready to repel them as befits a man of honour. I see here, sire, a fair lady, to whose hand, but yesterday, I had your majesty's permission and sanction to aspire—"

"You are right in that, sir," interrupted the king. "But, in the first place, at that time I was not aware—fully, at least—of the conduct which you had pursued; and, in the next place, I believed the hand of that lady to be free from all other engagements: but, after my return from hunting in the course of yesterday, I met with our gallant friend here, Monsieur de Rohan, and with no slight pleasure found him living whom we had all imagined to be dead."

"Whether your majesty have withdrawn the permission that you gave," continued the Count de Meyrand, "I cannot tell; but I trust not; and I know your majesty is too just to believe charges upon mere hearsay. The facts are very simple, however they may have been concealed. Monsieur de Rohan and myself are rivals. He has had many advantages over me in pursuing his suit, and I, in consequence, have resorted to every fair means and just stratagem to favour my suit also. I deny it not! I have done it! Love for this lady has been the motive, and love for her has suggested the

means. But, if Monsieur de Rohan dares to say that I have done aught dishonourable or wrong, I here, in the presence of your majesty, give him the lie; and dare him to prove his words upon my body, as becomes a gentleman and a soldier."

Bernard de Rohan took a step forward, with his colour somewhat heightened and his brow bent. The king, however, waved him back, saying, "I will hear you in a moment, Monsieur de Rohan; but first let me tell this gentleman that the charge against him, of which I speak, is not made by you, but by this lady, who accuses the Count de Meyrand of having, together with the Lord of Masseran, contrived and executed various schemes unworthy of a French gentleman and a man of honour. The Marquis of Masseran—a sovereign prince himself—is not amenable to us, but only to his suzerain, our cousin the Duke of Savoy. But Monsieur de Meyrand may well be questioned as to his conduct; and either now, or at some future time, shall be called upon to show whether he did or did not use unjustifiable means for getting Mademoiselle de Brienne into his hands. What were you about to say, Monsieur de Rohan?"

"Simply, my lord," replied Bernard de Rohan, "to reiterate in my own name the charges made against the Count de Meyrand by Mademoiselle de Brienne, and to add in distinct terms that he, Adrian of Meyrand, is a false and treacherous villain, who has deceived his friend, betrayed those that trusted him, and forgotten his own honour. Farther, I am ready, with your majesty's permission, which I earnestly crave, to prove these words upon him with my sword, and also to establish them by positive evidence, to your full satisfaction."

"I beseech you, sire," said the Count de Meyrand, "let the matter be speedily and briefly settled. As to entering into any other proofs after the words that have been spoken, that were needless. Hand to hand, as two French gentlemen, let us determine our difference. No other investigation is required. I own, without fear or shame, that I have used all fair means to win this lady's love; but I pronounce that any one who says that what I did, I did dishonourably, speaks falsely, and is a knave."

"The matter, Monsieur de Meyrand," replied the king, "is not so easily settled as you seem to think. Did cowardice always accompany vice, evil would not walk

so boldly as she does. Many a man who has dared to do a bad act, will dare to justify it at the risk of life; but *we* must judge by other proofs; and I ask you, Monsieur de Meyrand, whether now, in my presence, you are ready to go into the investigation of the charges against you, or whether you would have farther time?"

"I see no use, sire," said the Count de Meyrand, "of yielding any investigation regarding such matters. Monsieur de Rohan has already—"

"The charges are not alone those of Monsieur de Rohan," said the king, interrupting him. "Were that the case, perhaps we might give your enmity its course; but the charges are those of Mademoiselle de Brienne."

"It matters little, sire, whose they be," replied the count, boldly; "I have already said what I acknowledge. The manner in which it may be told by one party or the other will make all the difference; a shade may be cast here, or a shade there; suspicions may be brought to aggravate; words and deeds may be magnified and distorted. In cases like this, investigation can do no good; the matter turns upon a point of honour, and can be decided but by one means. The charges may be Mademoiselle de Brienne's. Your majesty avers it, and therefore it is: but the Baron de Rohan takes the charge upon himself. So let the matter rest between me and her champion."

"By Heaven, sir," exclaimed the king, his eye flashing and his cheek growing red, "you shall find that the king is her champion, and it may not be so easy to deal with him as any other. You refuse, sir, to meet the charges brought against you, as I think they should be met; and I lay my commands once more on Monsieur de Rohan, on no account or consideration whatsoever, either publicly or privately, to give you the meeting that you desire."

"Commands, doubtless, very easily obeyed," muttered the count between his teeth; but the king instantly checked him sternly.

"Were you, sir," he said, "as eminently distinguished for active and daring courage; were you as renowned a soldier, and as successful an officer as Monsieur de Rohan, even then your sneer could not touch a man who, during the whole of the Italian wars, let no post slip without bringing us some tidings of his gallant and daring actions. As it is, sir, inferior to him in every re-

spect, he may well refuse you the meeting that you seek, without any imputation on his courage; at all events, the king's commands fully justify him, and render your sneer contemptible."

"Perchance, sire," replied the Count de Meyrand, still unabashed, and acting on the plan he had previously laid out, "perchance, ere many days be over, I may have something more than sneers to bring against this honourable gentleman. Your majesty is now, I see, completely deceived; but the deception will not last long, and then—"

"This is too bold and barefaced," said the king. "If you suppose, sir, that by vague and unsupported words like these you can leave the taint of suspicion upon a tried and honourable man, you are very much deceived; and, for the very attempt, as well as for the charges which you refuse to meet, I banish you from this court; and you will be pleased to remain in the neighbourhood of your own estates near Châteaudun, and not to approach within twenty leagues of the city of Paris or the castle of Fontainebleau. I give you one day to make your preparations."

The Count de Meyrand, fully resolved not to suffer the charges against him to be thoroughly investigated, had ventured even to offend the king rather than suffer such a result to take place; but he by no means wished to do so more than necessary; and he replied with a low inclination of the head, "I bow most humbly to your majesty's pleasure. Your will in this, as in all other things, must be my law. It is only to see your majesty prejudiced against me, by the representations of one who loves you less than I do, that grieves me bitterly."

"No more, sir, no more," replied Henry, waving his hand; "I am quite satisfied. Those who will not answer such charges must be deemed guilty. You may retire."

CHAPTER V.

I RECOLLECT hearing a friend describe an interview he once had with Beethoven, which gave me a more sensible idea of the triumph of the spirit over the body, of the sublime power of imagination over the weakness of our corporeal organs, than anything else that I ever met with. As is well known, the great musician was very deaf, and much more so at some moments than at others. When the visiter entered, Beethoven was playing one of his finest compositions, which had not at that time been given to the world, and his back being turned towards the door, he did not perceive that any one came in. As he went on, all the various appearances of intense delight and emotion passed over his countenance, and at length the tears rolled down his cheeks as he concluded. The visiter then laid his hand upon his arm, and made him aware of how great was his admiration of all that he had just heard.

"Alas! my friend," replied the great harmonist, "I have not heard a single note. I can only imagine it."

But he had imagined and had felt it all; and such as the music thus imagined is happiness to the human heart. It consists of sensations within ourselves, varying, changing, fleeting, but all forming one grand harmony for our own hearts, and for our hearts alone.

There is nothing more difficult to paint and to dwell upon than happiness; for there is something in the human mind requiring that variety which each individual may find in positive enjoyment himself, but which is not easily derivable from any account of happiness in others. Our own happiness supplies us with variety from the various sensations and actions produced in our own mind. Each hour, each moment, may bring such a change of feeling, such a new tone from the same instrument, such a fresh chord in the same harmony, that it may never pall upon our own sense; but others cannot be made to see, or feel, or hear that which is going on in the secret chambers of our own bosom; and he who sits down to read a long description of the happiness of any other human being, is much

like a person reading the bill of a concert to which he cannot be admitted. Memory may tell him that some of the pieces are very beautiful. Imagination may try to conjure up something from the names of others; but both memory and imagination will fall so short of reality, that few will get to the end of the programme, and many stop at the first words.

The happiness of Bernard de Rohan and Isabel de Brienne, on the night after the interview which we have described in the last chapter, was of that bright and calm character which offers few points for the minds of others to rest upon. It was as a tranquil and a sunny sea, bright and beautiful to look upon, but curled only by a light wind, agitated no more than to a gentle ripple. To the hospitality of the Maréchal de Vieilleville Henry had committed them for the night, as, on account of some important business, the monarch confined himself to his own apartments; and Vieilleville himself, though somewhat formal and ceremonious withal, had a sufficient insight into the feelings which then moved them, to know that the best courtesy would be to leave them as much as possible alone.

The king himself had fixed the day for their remarriage, and had placed but a week's interval between them and that ceremony which was to unite their fate beyond all question; and while they sat there, and conversed over the past or the future, while they told and heard all that had happened to each, scarcely a doubt of the happiness of the coming years crossed the mind of either. They were happy alike in their fate and their anticipations; and when Bernard de Rohan at length rose to leave the little party assembled in the rooms of Monsieur de Vieilleville, he promised himself and Isabel another joyful meeting on the morrow.

He intended to take his way towards the inn where he had alighted on his arrival, as all the rooms in the palace had been appropriated before his coming; but in the corridor, just beyond the apartments of Monsieur de Vieilleville, he met a page, who put a billet into his hand. The young cavalier opened it, and, advancing to a lantern which hung over one of the doors, he was about to read, when the door itself opened, and the dauphin entered the corridor.*

* It may seem strange to speak of a lantern in the corridors of a royal palace; but such was the custom of the day.

Bernard de Rohan had seen enough to be aware that the handwriting was that of the Count de Meyrand, and he ceased reading somewhat suddenly.

"Ha! Monsieur de Rohan," said the dauphin. "Well met! Well met! I was seeking a companion for an adventure, and you are just the man. You have been lately in the land of song, too; so give me the aid of your good voice. But come with me, come with me. Here are lutes in this neighbouring chamber; and we may as well cast on some disguise."

"I follow your highness," replied Bernard de Rohan, partly divining what the young prince wished; but, turning to the page before he went, he said, in a low voice, "I will read the note hereafter, and send an answer without delay."

Thus saying, he followed the dauphin through an anteroom, where a number of attendants were seated, who started up at the appearance of the prince, and thence into a chamber beyond, which was vacant. Here Francis paused for a moment to explain his purpose.

"There are other bright eyes in this palace besides those of your own fair lady, Monsieur de Rohan," he said. "In the farther wing, not to be seen by any but her own maids till her public appearance at the court tomorrow, is my promised bride, the fairest of the fair; and I would fain let her know, by some soft music beneath her window, that there is one here prepared to love and cherish her. I was going myself, for I must not trust any of my own people; but you are happily met with, and we will take our lutes and set out. Here! here is a cloak to wrap you in, and there, on that table, lies another lute; but I fear it is not in tune."

"I will soon remedy that," replied Bernard de Rohan, taking up the instrument and running his hand over the strings with some skill acquired in Italy. "I fear, however, I shall be but a poor performer, yet I will do my best."

The instrument was soon in tune, the cloaks thrown on, and, passing by another way than that by which they came, Bernard de Rohan and his royal companion issued forth from the prince's apartments, and, threading the long passages and dim corridors of the palace, arrived at a small door which was not shut, and gave them egress to the open air.

"Come hither, come hither," said the dauphin, leading the way close to the wall of the palace. "The moon shines too brightly. Let us keep out of the light."

In those days there were some trees—old inhabitants of the forest—which actually approached within a few yards of the palace itself; and it so happened that the windows of that wing to which the dauphin now conducted Bernard de Rohan were turned in the direction of the tall elms, as if for the very purpose of affording the tenant an opportunity of hearing a song of love sung under the wide-spreading branches. Leading the way thither, in the shadow cast by the building, the prince took his place upon the soft green turf, which has now been long covered with heavy piles of stone; and, leaning his back against one of the trees, he struck a few notes from the instrument he carried, and began to sing. It was soon evident that the song was heard; for the lights which had been observed in one of the chambers of the building were removed, as if to give no encouragement; but, at the same time, that sign of disapprobation was counterbalanced by the appearance of one or two female heads at the casement, the fair ladies to whom they belonged choosing to imagine that the darkness of the hour would prevent them from being seen.

The song of the dauphin had not reached a close, however, when the figures of two other men were seen to issue forth from the shadow of one of the old towers, and approach rapidly towards the spot where the serenaders stood.

"What can be done?" exclaimed Francis, as his eye fell upon them. "My father will not easily forgive me; for he bade me not to let any one know that the princess has arrived at Fontainebleau."

"Perhaps they may not have any intention of molesting us," replied Bernard de Rohan; "let us walk slowly away. If they pursue us, I will turn and stop them."

The dauphin adopted the suggestion at once, and walked on in a different direction from that of his own apartments, followed by Bernard de Rohan. The two strangers, however, pursued at a quick pace; and a moment after, the young cavalier felt a smart blow upon his arm, while the voice of the Count de Meyrand was heard exclaiming, "Now, sir! now! We are out of

sight of the windows, and no place could be better; or are you flying like a coward?"

Bernard de Rohan turned sternly upon him. "You know, sir," he said, "that the commands of the king fix my sword to the scabbard, or I would have punished you long ere this."

"Brave men never seek excuses, sir: cowards are never without them," replied the count; "but we know how to treat those who use them. Draw, sir, draw!" and, at the same moment, he again struck his adversary with the flat of his sword, which was already naked in his hand.

Bernard de Rohan could endure no more; his sword sprang from the sheath, and was in a moment crossed with that of the Count de Meyrand. Both were well practised in the use of their weapon; but Bernard de Rohan, from the constant habit of warlike exercises, was decidedly superior in activity and precision. He parried the furious passes of his adversary without suffering the point ever to approach his bosom; and, in an effort which the count made to overreach him by a feint, he took advantage of one careless moment to disarm him, and send his sword flying among the trees. The count was brought on his knee by the effort he had made; but at that very instant there was a sound of many voices coming from the palace, and cries of "Where? where?"

Meyrand started upon his feet, gazed round with a rapid glance, as if for the person who had accompanied him thither; and then, with one look of rage and disappointment at Bernard de Rohan, plunged into the wood and disappeared. Bernard de Rohan, on his part, also turned to look for the dauphin; but Francis, not having perceived who it was that approached when his companion was attacked by Meyrand, and thinking it merely some of his father's officers, had hastened onward at once towards the tall iron railings, or grille, which at that time separated the old gardens of the palace from the forest; and, passing through a small gate, he had already entered the chateau itself on the other side.

A party of the guard were now approaching the spot where Bernard de Rohan stood in the clear moonlight. The night was so bright that, even if he had been able to escape, it was more than probable he was already recognised; but he felt no inclination to have

recourse to flight; and calmly replacing his sword in the scabbard, he advanced in the direct line of the persons who were approaching, as if either to meet them or to re-enter the palace. The moment he came up, however, he was seized by the archers of the guard, who, though a somewhat unruly body themselves, were very zealous in preventing any one else from infringing the laws regarding the royal habitation.

"Swords drawn within the precincts of the palace!" cried one.

"Fetch the provost," exclaimed another.

"Let me pass! let me pass!" cried a third, who proved to be a lieutenant of the guard. "How now, Monsieur le Baron de Rohan?" he said. "You have been found with your sword drawn within the precincts of the king's hotel: do you not know that such is a great crime?"

"To draw one's sword willingly, my good friend, is a great crime," replied Bernard de Rohan, "but not to defend one's life when attacked. I was followed hither this moment, struck, and assailed, sword in hand, by a man whom I have just disarmed. You will find his sword somewhere under the trees there. There is no crime, I suppose, in my having defended my own life?"

"Run and seek for the sword he speaks of," said the lieutenant, in the quick and imperative tone given by a little brief authority. "Pray, Monsieur de Rohan, what were you doing here at this hour of the night?"

"As I cannot conceive that there can be any crime in my being out in the forest on a moonlight night," the young cavalier replied, "I do not feel myself bound, sir, to give you any account of my conduct in that respect, nor do I see what you have to do with it."

"Your pardon, good sir, your pardon," replied the lieutenant. "We have everything in the world to do with it, as we have the king's own especial orders to keep a strict watch and guard round this quarter of the palace during the whole night. Doubtless his majesty was informed of some evil intentions, otherwise he would not have given particular orders on the present occasion."

"Be so good, my friend," said Bernard de Rohan, turning to one of the archers, "as to take your hand from my shoulder, for I am not accustomed to bear any one's hands upon me patiently, and have a way of removing

unpleasant things that may not be agreeable to you. Under the circumstances you have mentioned," he continued, again addressing the lieutenant, "and as I have been forced undoubtedly to draw my sword in my own defence within these precincts, it may be as well if we go immediately to the presence of his majesty himself, that I may explain to him the whole matter."

"It is impossible you can do so to-night, sir," replied the lieutenant of the guard, very well pleased to make his authority felt: "the king has gone to rest, and my duty is straightforward. I have no business to trouble his majesty upon the subject at all. You must deal with the prévôt de l'hôtel, Monsieur de Rohan, and to him you can tell what tale you like."

"I shall certainly tell none but the true one, sir," replied Bernard de Rohan; "and pray where is the prévôt to be found, that the business may be settled at once?"

"Oh, that I cannot tell," answered the lieutenant, in a dry tone. "We shall doubtless find him to-morrow morning; for it is no reason why we should disturb anybody's rest that you choose to walk out by moonlight. In the mean time, you will be pleased to take up your abode in the inner guardroom; and though I fancy I ought to require you to give up your sword, I shall content myself with putting a sentinel at the door, if you will pledge me your word not to make your escape."

"That of course I will do, sir," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I am always ready and willing to submit to lawful authority; and as I doubt not that, under the circumstances, you are perfectly justified in what you do, I shall make no resistance, nor any attempt to evade the restraint you think necessary to impose."

"Ay, that is speaking like a reasonable gentleman now," said the lieutenant, a good deal mollified. "Come, we will walk on together, sir. Ha! is that the sword, Fauchamp? A costly weapon, upon my life! Morbleu! The hilt is all gold and jewels. It will be long ere it fits its owner's hand again;" and, evidently taking possession of the Count de Meyrand's sword as his own property, the worthy lieutenant led the way into the palace, and consigned his prisoner to a small chamber within the guardroom, where were a bed, a table, and a chair. A sentinel was ordered to stand at the door,

though there was no exit whatsoever but through the chamber in which all the guard on duty passed the night; and the only sign of civility which the lieutenant thought fit to show, was to order a lamp to be given to his prisoner, and to ask if he could do anything for him.

"Merely," replied Bernard de Rohan, "to send two messages for me, one to the inn called the Sceptre, in the town, where my people, who have not yet had their master among them four-and-twenty hours, are waiting my return from the palace. Let them know that I remain here to-night. The other message I wish you to despatch is to his highness the dauphin, telling him where I am, and on what account."

"We cannot disturb him, sir," replied the lieutenant, inclined to be a little more civil, but somewhat harsh and unyielding by nature. "To-morrow morning we can send your message."

"The dauphin has not yet gone to bed," replied Bernard de Rohan: "I saw him not long ago, and take the responsibility of the act upon myself."

"Well, sir," replied the officer, "so be it then. It shall be done." Thus saying, he left the room and closed the door.

Bernard de Rohan sat himself down at the table, and, leaning his head upon his hand, mused over the strange fate which seemed to dog his footsteps ever since his return to France. On the present occasion, however, his countenance bore a smile, for he did not consider the circumstances in which he was placed as involving any serious danger, or menacing anything more, indeed, than a little temporary discomfort and annoyance. He had, in fact, only sent to the dauphin in order to ascertain what the prince's wishes were, and whether he might mention, on the succeeding day, the cause of his having been out in the forest at that hour of night.

He had not to wait long ere the prince appeared, with a flushed cheek, and a good deal of anxiety in his countenance.

"What is all this, Monsieur de Rohan?" he said. "I shall be deeply grieved, indeed, if, after the strong manner in which Monsieur de Brissac wrote to me concerning you, and with all the causes which—as I told you yesterday, when I saw you on your first arrival—I have to esteem you and to serve you—I shall be bitter-

ly grieved, I say, if I have led you into any misfortune such as now seems to have fallen upon you."

Bernard de Rohan, however, treated the matter lightly. "I thank your highness much," he said, "for your good opinion, and deeply grateful am I to Brissac for writing so frequently both to you and the Duchess de Valentinois, to interest you in my favour; but there is nothing in my present case, I trust, to deserve any apprehension."

"But you should not have drawn upon the people who followed us," said the dauphin, "even if they had attempted to seize me. They would soon have recognised me."

"Nay, my lord," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I did not draw upon them except in self-defence; nor were they the people you suppose. It would seem that the Count de Meyrand, and some other person, watched us from the palace and followed us. When I turned round, I found him with his sword drawn upon me. I bade him recollect the king's commands, and said all I could to stop him; but he struck me twice, and was deaf to all reason, so that I was forced to draw in my own defence. I disarmed him, but did not hurt him; and he fled upon the guard coming up. This I will explain to the king to-morrow, and I think your royal father will hold me free from all blame."

"Oh, beyond all doubt," replied the dauphin, "though there may be need of some proof."

"The guard have got his sword," replied Bernard de Rohan. "It is richly ornamented, it seems, and will soon be recognised. That will be proof enough, surely."

"I should think so," replied the dauphin. "I could have wished, indeed, that there had been no need for mentioning me in the matter; but, however—"

"There is no need, my lord," replied Bernard de Rohan: "it will only be necessary for me to say, if asked why I was there, that I went forth to give a serenade to a fair lady. I dare say the lute which I threw down when they attacked me has been found, which will prove the truth of the tale; and I need neither say to what lady the serenade was to be addressed, nor who was my companion by the way."

The countenance of the dauphin cleared up. "Excellent!" he said, "excellent!. You know how strict my father's ideas of obedience are; and as you are well

aware, De Rohan, now that our fair friend the duchess is not so loving as she was towards the Guises, there are all sorts of intrigues going forward, which my hapless serenade might embarrass. Such were my reasons for not wishing it known. But I will ask if they have found the lute; and although I fear you must endure one night's imprisonment for my sake, I will take care it shall not be passed in such a filthy den as this, filled with the stale fumes of wine and ill-trimmed lamps. Ha! come in here, master lieutenant," he added, opening the door: "have your people found a lute belonging to Monsieur de Rohan?"

"Yes, your highness," replied the lieutenant, with a profound inclination; "that is to say, a lute was found near the spot where he was arrested."

"Keep it, and the sword you found also," said the dauphin: "they must be shown to the king to-morrow. In the mean time, you must not think of detaining a gentleman of Monsieur de Rohan's rank in such a chamber as this. He has committed no offence."

"He was found with a drawn sword, your royal highness," replied the lieutenant, anxious to justify himself.

"And so are my page and my armorer every day," cried the dauphin. "However, sir, I do not seek to interfere with the execution of your duties; I merely require you to place Monsieur de Rohan in a more commodious apartment, till those who are competent decide whether he have committed any offence or not."

"There is none other that I know of vacant in the palace, my lord," replied the lieutenant; "at least, none at my disposal."

"Then I will put one at your disposal," rejoined the dauphin. "In my apartments there is the cabinet in the west tower, where my chief page sleeps: the page must sleep with his brother to-night, and Monsieur de Rohan have that room. You can put a guard at the door if you please."

"I would not so far presume, your highness," said the lieutenant; "but you know when the Marquis de Palluprat was arrested, and the lieutenant of the guard suffered him—"

"It matters not, it matters not," replied the dauphin: "you may put a guard if you please. Come, De Rohan, follow me;" and, thus saying, he opened the door, and went out accompanied by the Baron de Rohan,

and followed by the lieutenant of the guard and a sentinel.

The chamber to which the prince conducted the young cavalier was certainly much more convenient and comfortable in every respect than that which they had just quitted; and, bidding the kind-hearted prince farewell, Bernard de Rohan, who, as we have more than once said, had little imagination for personal dangers and risks, threw off his clothes, cast himself down on the bed, and, after thinking a while over his late interview with Isabel de Brienne, fell into a tranquil slumber, forgetful of all that was disagreeable in the events of the evening.

CHAPTER VI.

Nearly two hours after the events had occurred which we have described in the last chapter, the hostess of the auberge called the *Sceptre*, in the town of Fontainebleau, started up from a conversation in which she was engaged with a man dressed in a clerical habit, and exclaiming, "There they are at the door!" snatched from the table a bottle of fine wine, which, about ten years before, had swelled out the grapes some twenty miles above Lyons, and quitted the small parlour on the ground floor in which she had been sitting. The priest rubbed his eyes and followed her; and in a moment after, the same chamber was tenanted by two gentlemen with whom we have more particularly to do.

"All is lost by that unfortunate lunge," exclaimed the Count de Meyrand, casting himself heavily into a seat as he entered. "My foot slipped, or my hand shook, or my eyesight failed me, or some folly, I know not what. But all is lost, evidently—all is lost: love, and revenge, and all."

"Nay, you are soon disheartened!" said the Lord of Masseran. "For a brave man, and one who dares meddle with dangerous things, without pausing or pondering, like a goldsmith, to weigh a grain or two less here and there, you are soon disheartened, indeed! too soon for a man who has staked all upon this chance, and who, by the event of the next hour, may be ruined for life."

"Nay, nay, Monsieur de Masseran," replied the count, whose pride would not let him hear another say what he would say himself; "ruined for life I cannot be. You much mistake if you think that any king can deal with a French noble as sovereigns and emperors can deal with petty Italian lords. The king's favour may be lost! That cannot be helped; but farther than that I am not injured."

"Good sooth," replied the Lord of Masseran, "I thought the matter was much worse than that. I thought that the king's favour once gone for ever, all chance of obtaining her you love was gone also; for we may devise schemes to carry her off—to take her to other lands—to use force or stratagem, or wit or persuasion, all in vain. Out of those dark walls you can never get her, but with her own and with the king's consent. Then, again, you drew your sword within the precincts of the palace, which brings you in danger of the good prévôt, who is a man somewhat fond of sharp knives. I have heard, and I know that such things as forfeitures have taken place for acts not very dissimilar."

The count looked gloomily down upon the table, and clasped his hands so tight together that the fingers became white.

"Am I not right?" demanded the Lord of Masseran; "am I not right in saying, that on the next step depends your utter ruin or salvation?"

"By Heaven!" exclaimed the Count de Meyrand, "if my ruin comes, yours shall go along with it, Lord of Masseran! What avails it to tell me what I pointed out before, that all is lost: love, ambition, revenge? What avails it to repeat all this, and, like some drivelling grandmother, to dwell upon evils when they are self-evident, without suggesting a means either of fleeing from the consequences or remedying what is gone amiss? What is your suggestion? Where is your resource? What is to be done? If you have nothing to propose, be silent, or leave me."

Such, however, was not at all the purpose of the Lord of Masseran, who, in truth, had something to propose, but still found no small enjoyment in seeing his confederate stripped of all his airs of indifference and superiority, and giving himself up to passion and vehement disappointment.

"Is this the calm, cool, reasoning Count de Meyrand?" he said, looking on him with one of his serpent glances. "Is this the calculating, strategetic Frenchman, whose resources seemed unfailing and schemes innumerable? Nay, nay, rise not up with such a flaming brow! You forget your sword is gone, so do not strive to grasp the hilt!"

"Curses on it!" exclaimed the count, casting himself down on the seat, and striking the table vehemently with his clinched fist. "Curses on it! or, rather, on this bungling hand!"

"Well, well," said the Lord of Masseran, "hear what I have to propose, and see whether it may suit your lordly nature. It is a bold measure, but we have none but bold measures left. This business must soon be known. You cannot escape far enough, ere it be public, to put yourself out of the reach of danger. The king can reach you wherever you may be. If you grant these premises, I will go on and show you how—by risking nothing farther than is already risked—you may perchance turn aside the blow from yourself, and, at all events, gain a great and important advantage over your rival."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the count, musing. "Indeed! The way must be clear and straightforward, however, my good lord. I know not how or why, but it seems to me that crooked paths do not prove successful with me. What is it that you have to propose, and what to promise?"

"I will not promise you," replied the Lord of Masseran, "that you will ever obtain the hand of the lady—at all events, for some years; for, were I to promise it, I should be deceiving you, which, notwithstanding your suspicions, I do not seek to do. But I will promise you—and you shall see how, in a moment—that your rival shall never obtain her hand either."

"How so? How so?" exclaimed the count, starting up and gazing eagerly in his companion's face. "That were, indeed, worth striving for at any risk. Revenge! revenge! revenge would then be mine; and I would give this right hand up to-morrow, to be struck off by a butcher's knife, in order to see him withering day by day under love, disappointment, and despair. How so? But it is impossible!"

"Not only perfectly possible, but perfectly easy,"

replied the Lord of Masseran, "and with not a greater degree of risk than you run by any other course you can pursue."

"I fear not risks!" exclaimed the count. "Speak! speak! what would you have me do?"

"Simply this," replied his companion. "At the hour of the king's rising to-morrow, present yourself at the door of his chamber, and beseech admittance on business of importance. To no nobleman of your rank is it refused at that hour. Cast yourself at his feet. Tell him in humble terms that you come to offer him your head. Power always loves the exaggeration of submission. Then, when he asks your meaning, say that, notwithstanding his orders, your anger, indignation, and jealousy had caused you to call the Baron de Rohan to the field. Doubtless he will eagerly inquire the result, supposing by your coming that you have killed your adversary. Then tell him that, in going beyond the precincts of the palace, in order to settle the affair, you two had drawn upon each other, when the guard coming up, you had been accidentally disarmed and escaped."

"It may be as well, indeed, to do so," said the count, in a disappointed tone; "because, to tell the offence first one's self is the best way to deal with Henry; but, except in producing some mitigation of his anger for this offence, I see not what good it will do. I see not how it will prevent this fatal marriage that they are hurrying on."

"I will tell you how," replied the Lord of Masseran. "In one moment I will tell you how. Henry, to prevent this event from taking place, has pledged his honour to Bernard de Rohan, that if, on any provocation, he draws his sword upon you, he shall never obtain the hand of Isabel de Brienne so long as Henry the Second is king of France. The page who announced to the king that you were in waiting, told me the very words the monarch used, for he heard them, and thought he was doing good service in noising it about, because I pretended to be very anxious lest an encounter should take place. Thus the king's word is pledged, and he will sooner die than break it, if you can but prove to him that your meeting of last night was by appointment. If you cannot do that, and show that De Rohan was as ready as yourself, the king may get over it as a

chance encounter, or pardon it on the plea that your enemy did it in self-defence. It is easy to say that he first drew his sword on you."

"But that is false!" said the Count de Meyrand. "It is a downright lie!"

"False!" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, with a shrill, mocking laugh. "A lie! Why, is this the first falsehood we have got over in the matter? I thought the general principle on which we acted was, that everything is fair in love and war. But if you are scrupulous, good count—if your stomach turns at one small falsehood more—"

"But this is so direct!" cried the count; "and yet it must be done. We must leave no part of this last point doubtful or difficult. You, Masseran, however, must lie too."

"Oh, I will lie most zealously," replied the marquis, without the least hesitation. "I hold a lie well told to be even more virtuous and honourable than truth, when it is really necessary and justified by expediency. What would kings, courtiers, politicians, or priests be without a lie? I am not so weak a dabbler as to be frightened from my purpose by a bad name given to a good thing! What is the lie you want? I will answer that for it, I tell it well."

"Doubtless!" replied the Count de Meyrand, with a sneer, from which he could not refrain even then. "However, you must swear that you saw the challenge which I sent him."

"Oh, but you did send him a challenge, I know," replied the other; "so I can well swear that I saw it. That is but half a lie," he added, in a tone of disappointment. "But why does your brow become cloudy again? Is there any new scruple suggests itself to your delicate mind?"

"No," answered the count; "but there is a new doubt. Masseran, your plan of vowing that he drew on me will not do! You and I, in our eagerness, have both forgotten that he was not alone. Did not the boy who carried my cartel tell us that he was with the dauphin, and would send an answer? And was not the youth who accompanied him when we came up exactly of the height and air of Francis himself?"

"Exactly," answered the Savoyard, coolly, "exactly, because it was himself. But, my good count, though quite as eager in this business, I am not quite so agita-

ted in it as the calm, indifferent Count de Meyrand; and I will tell you something that you did not perceive. The dauphin never turned his head, but hastened away with all speed through the grille into the gardens. He and his companion were upon some work that Francis did not choose to be caught in performing. It might be making love to a soubrette, or it might be stealing apples, or any other thing to which boys are given; but he ran away as soon as we came up, and can no more tell which drew first upon the other than if he had been in his bed asleep."

"That is fortunate," said the count, more calmly; "and your project shall be followed, my good friend. But let us not be taken by surprise on any point. Early to-morrow we must gain intelligence of all that has passed since this affair took place—what has become of De Rohan—whether it was really the guard that came up—everything, in short."

As he spoke, he pressed his hand upon his brow, as if it ached; and the Lord of Masseran replied, "Leave that to me; and get you to rest, that your thoughts may be clear and calm. I will see some of the baron's servants by daylight to-morrow, and discover everything. Before the king's rising I will tell you all. But now to bed; I will back to the palace; so good-night."

Thus saying, he left him, and walked out into the air, but returned not to the palace at once, pacing slowly up and down on the shaded side of the street, as if the very moonlight were too bright to shine upon his thoughts.

"He is weak and wavering," said the Lord of Masseran to himself, thinking of the Count de Meyrand; "he is weak and wavering. I must not trust him with anything great; but there is still some pleasure in making these daring, vain, chattering Frenchmen outwit each other, and bring about their own ruin while they are plotting skilfully against others. Ha, ha! Now, if this hound follows the scent truly, he will ruin all his own hopes for ever, as well as those of that keen, harsh soldier. That once done, commend me the girl to a nunnery, and the fortune falls in to our fair and obedient lady. I wish my messengers from the south would arrive. They might have been here this morning early. I fear something has gone wrong: whether they have not found the youth? or he have proved refractory?"

In such pleasant speculations as these the Lord of Masseran occupied about half an hour. I have often thought, when looking at the motions of a serpent—the slow, gliding, tortuous way in which it advances—the seeming slumber in which it sometimes lies waiting for its prey—the sudden, writhing dart with which it rushes upon its enemy or its food—together with the quiet, dull sort of security which is apparent in its horny eye —I have often thought that I discovered a degree of pride and self-satisfaction in its wily and silent skill.

The same sort of serpent pride filled the heart of the Lord of Masseran, and, I believe, has filled the heart of many another artful man in deceit and fraud. While the Count de Meyrand, who was in that most miserable of all miserable states, unconfirmed, unhardened villany, lay tossing, feverish, and restless on the bed of care and self-reproach, the Lord of Masseran slept calmly and soundly during the hours he gave to rest, and woke at the break of day with a mind clear and refreshed, to pursue without scruple, fear, or hesitation, the same dark schemes into which, as we have seen, he had plunged. We say without fear; for, though there had been difficulties, obstacles, and dangers from time to time to ward off and to encounter, sufficient to give him momentary alarm, yet the ease with which he had surmounted them, by playing off one person against another, had served to give him perfect reliance in his own powers. He hastened to dress himself, then, in order to ascertain exactly what had followed the encounter of the preceding night, and had already given directions to an attendant to seek one of the followers of the Baron de Rohan, when another servant entered, leading the way before a man booted and spurred, and dusty with rapid travelling.

We have seen that to those towards whom he judged it not necessary to assume a calm and insinuating air, the Lord of Masseran could be fierce, haughty, and harsh, and he instantly turned upon the courier who entered with an angry and menacing air, saying, "How is it, Geronimo, that you have kept me waiting a whole day? You should have been here yesterday morning."

"I thought it best, my lord," replied the man, in a humble tone, "as I have news of great importance to tell you—I thought it best not to come away with any part of my story imperfect, and I spent the whole of

one day making inquiries in the neighbourhood of Cerdon—but I cannot speak plainly till you can hear me alone."

"Leave the room, leave the room!" said the Lord of Masseran, addressing the other servants; and in an instant the chamber was cleared, the door shut, and the tapestry drawn over it.

The two attendants, one of whom had been aiding his lord in dressing when the other entered, showing Geronimo the way, now remained together in the little antechamber. They kept at a respectful distance from the door which led into their lord's apartment, knowing his habits of suspicion and his dislike of being listened to; but they themselves talked together in low tones, seated on the coffer in the window. The one asked the other what tidings Geronimo brought from Savoy: the other replied that Geronimo had not been to Savoy, for he had only gone to carry a message to Count Henry: what news had been brought back the man declared he could not say, but from a few words that had passed, he fancied it was something that Geronimo thought would please their master mightily.

This anticipation, however, seemed by no means to be just; for, in about twenty minutes, the Lord of Masseran opened the door suddenly, without the least noise announcing that he was about to do so, and, looking sharply round the room, as if to see that nobody had been near the door, he said with a heavy, lowering, and somewhat anxious brow, "Has none of Monsieur de Rohan's servants been found? Go and see—quick, go and see."

Both the servants ran out at once, and in about five minutes one of them returned, bringing with him the servant of Bernard de Rohan whom we have before mentioned, called Pierre Millort. The latter was instantly admitted to the chamber of the Savoyard nobleman, and remained there some minutes alone with the Lord of Masseran, Geronimo having come out and taken his station in the anteroom. Whatever took place within, profound stillness reigned in the outer chamber; for the valet durst ask no questions, and Geronimo was as silent as the grave, stopping all inquiry by a declaration that his lord had strictly forbidden him to mention the tidings to any one till he himself thought fit to disclose them. At length Bernard's servant came

forth and went his way, replying to some words the Lord of Masseran addressed to him, "I won't fail to tell my lord, sir, how kind you have been."

The Savoyard closed the door, and walked two or three times up and down the room with a dark and sneering smile upon his countenance, pausing every five or ten steps, and thinking deeply. At length, after a longer pause than usual, he burst out into a laugh, exclaiming, "What so natural! They quarrelled on the road, fought, and he was killed! Now, then, the whole is at an end for ever."

This conclusion seemed to be perfectly satisfactory to him; he called in his servant again, concluded the process of dressing, and then hurried forth towards the inn to seek the Count de Meyrand. When he arrived there, however, he found that Meyrand, after passing a sleepless night, had risen early, and, impatient of delay, had gone at once to the palace.

"By Heaven," exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, "he may ruin all with his weak impetuosity; but the king, most likely, has not risen yet. I must speed back and see."

Thus saying, he turned his steps without a moment's delay towards the palace, and sought the antechamber of the king's apartments. He found nobody there, however, but ushers and other ordinary attendants; and on inquiry as to whether the king had risen, he was answered in the affirmative, the page adding that his majesty was engaged in business of importance with the Count de Meyrand. The Lord of Masseran turned away, muttering to himself, "Well, after all, the best and surest card is in my own hand. He cannot do much harm."

At that moment a gentleman issued forth from the king's chamber, and, as soon as he saw him, exclaimed, "Ha! Monsieur de Masseran, I was coming to seek you! His majesty requires your presence."

CHAPTER VII.

The custom of the kings of France, from the time of Charlemagne down to the last of the Capets, to receive various members of their court while they were rising and dressing in the morning, is so well known that we need scarcely tell the public that it did exist. On the present occasion, however, Henry, not well satisfied with the conduct of the Count of Meyrand, and wishing to mark his displeasure, had kept him waiting in the antechamber for some time till he was nearly dressed. The count was then admitted; and the pale, anxious, and agitated countenance that he bore—his troubled air, so unlike his usual demeanour—and especially so unlike his demeanour of the day before, somewhat moved the compassion of the kind-hearted king; and he thought, "After all, this man has some grace, and repents the insolent conduct into which he was hurried yesterday."

"I come, sir," said the Count de Meyrand, advancing towards the king, "to put my life at your disposal. I have committed an act which I acknowledge to be perfectly inexcusable; and, whatever may be your majesty's decision, I shall bow to it with more humility and contrition than I displayed yesterday, when my mind was, I confess, in a state bordering on phrensy; and, indeed, to temporary madness alone can I attribute my whole conduct during that day."

The king's brow contracted again; but, before he could reply, an attendant appeared, saying, "The prévôt de l'hôtel, sire, is without, desiring earnestly to speak to your majesty."

"Bid him enter," said the king, in a stern tone; and then, turning towards the count, he added, "If I interpret your words rightly, Monsieur de Meyrand, I shall have need of him before you quit me. Now, prévôt, what is it that you want?"

"I wished to know your majesty's will," replied the prévôt, with a low inclination, "as to what is to be done regarding the Baron de Rohan, who was taken by the guard last night, with his sword drawn, near the grille

enclosing the gardens. It is held to be within the precincts of the palace, sire, though I confess the matter may be doubtful, and probably Monsieur de Rohan was not aware that it is so."

"Bring him hither immediately," replied the king. "We have more important questions to settle with Monsieur de Rohan than that, I think. An error we can pardon; wilful disobedience must be punished, or else the kingly power in intrusted to us in vain. This, Monsieur de Meyrand," he continued, while the provost retired, "this, I naturally suppose, is connected with the matter which brought you hither: is it not so?"

"Doubtless it is, sire," replied the count. "I do confess that, moved by jealousy, indignation, and despair, I wrote to Monsieur de Rohan last night, calling upon him to meet me. He came forth for that purpose, I having no intention, indeed, of drawing my sword within the well-known precincts of your royal residence." He said it without faltering or hesitation, so familiar will a direct falsehood, shuddered at at first, become to a man's mind by one single night of evil consideration. "He drew upon me, however," continued the count; "and, taken by surprise, as well as hearing the guard coming near, I suffered myself to be disarmed."

"There was no blood spilled?" demanded the king.

"None, sire," answered the count. "But still I own my fault while I regret it, and acknowledge that it was my intention to carry the matter to the last extreme."

"There is some virtue in sincerity, at least," replied the king, after musing for a moment; "but here comes Monsieur de Rohan. Gentlemen, stand aside. Monsieur de Brèzé, put forward that chair, if you please. Now let these two rivals stand before me. What have you to say for yourself, Monsieur Bernard de Rohan, first, for disobeying my most strict commands, and, secondly, for drawing your sword within the precincts of the palace?"

"To both, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, calmly and straightforwardly, "to both I have the same answer to make, that I did not draw my sword willingly, nor till I was compelled to do so in defence of my own life as well as my own honour. My honour I could well trust in your majesty's hands; but my life, as you were not there to defend it, I was bound to defend myself."

"But the Count de Meyrand, here," replied the king, "the Count de Meyrand, here, informs me that, while going forward to a more convenient and lawful place for such encounters, you drew your sword upon him."

"This, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, in a calm, steady, and determined voice, and at the same time fixing his eyes upon the countenance of Meyrand, which was very pale, "this assertion of Adrian de Meyrand is, like the whole of his life, a lie."

"You hear," said the king, turning to the Count de Meyrand. "What proofs can you give of your assertion?"

"Every proof, sire," replied the count. "Will Monsieur de Rohan deny that he received my cartel? Will he deny that he came out to meet me?"

"The latter I will certainly deny," replied Bernard de Rohan. "In regard to the cartel, sire," he continued, turning to the king, "I certainly did receive a note last night from Monsieur de Meyrand, sent, not by any French gentleman, but by a simple page. I opened it; but scarcely saw more than the first word, when his highness the dauphin coming up and engaging me in conversation, I told the page that I would send an answer, and have never thought of the paper since. It is here, sire;" and he placed it in the king's hand. "I then ventured to go out," he continued, "taking with me an instrument of music lent by his highness the dauphin, in order to give a serenade, in the Venetian fashion, to a fair lady now in the palace, when I was overtaken by Monsieur de Meyrand and another person, the Lord of Masseran, I think—"

The Count de Meyrand nodded his head in sign of affirmation; and the king, turning round to one of the gentlemen near, said, "Summon the Lord of Masseran, Villeblanche, to be here immediately. Go on, Monsieur de Rohan."

"The count, when I first saw him," Bernard de Rohan proceeded, "had his sword drawn. The first notice I had of his presence was a blow from the flat side of the weapon; and when, remonstrating with him, I bade him recollect your majesty's injunctions, he called me coward, used the most insulting language, struck me again, and compelled me to draw in my own defence."

"I hope you are dealing with me sincerely, Mon-

sieur de Rohan," said the king; "in this very note which you have put into my hand, there is an invitation to meet the Count de Meyrand with a hostile purpose, at the very spot where I understand you were found. Was there any instrument of music discovered?" he continued, turning to the prévôt.

"Yes, sire," replied the prévôt; "a lute was found near the spot where the baron stood."

"A mere pretext, sire," said the count; "but here is my Lord of Masseran; let him speak of what he saw."

"Now, sir," said the king, turning to the Lord of Masseran, "I have to request that you will detail, without communication with any one here present, what you witnessed between these two gentlemen last night. Here is a strange discrepance in their statements. Relate, if you please, all that took place."

The reply of the Lord of Masseran was as artful as it could possibly be. "You take me quite by surprise, sire," he said, "for I came upon a matter totally different; an event sad and terrible, which it is my painful task to disclose to your majesty, and which really quite bewilders me; but I will answer your questions first, sire. Knowing that the noble Count de Meyrand had sent a cartel to Monsieur de Rohan, I accompanied the count towards the spot which he had appointed to meet his adversary, for the purpose of going farther into the forest and settling their differences, wherever they could find an open space beyond the precincts, with fair ground and clear moonlight. Almost as soon as we were out of the palace, we saw Monsieur de Rohan before us, going towards the spot; and Monsieur de Meyrand took a step forward to speak with him."

"What did he say?" demanded the king.

"I was a step or two behind," said the Lord of Masseran, "so that I did not catch the exact words; but I suppose he gave him good-night, or exchanged with him some of those ordinary courtesies which gentlemen in such situations sweetly offer to each other before they cut one another's throats. The moment after, Monsieur de Rohan drew; and, before I had time to represent that we were in the precincts of the palace, Monsieur de Meyrand had drawn also."

The count had watched him with a strong inclination to smile, notwithstanding all the agitation he did really

feel at the honest, straightforward, truth-like air with which the Lord of Masseran told his story.

The king, however, interrupted it in this part to ask, "Are you sure, my Lord of Masseran, that the Baron de Rohan was the first to draw his sword?"

"Sire," replied the Lord of Masseran, solemnly, "I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that he was."

"What say you now, Monsieur de Rohan?" said the king.

"Simply this, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, indignant at the falsehood, "that every word I have spoken to your majesty is the plain truth; and let me beg you to call to your recollection that no one, either for the inducements of policy, ay, or even to deceive an enemy in the field—though both in cabinets and camps such things are held as no dishonour—has known me ever to utter one falsehood; that no light excuse, even to free me from a troublesome friend; no deceitful cause assigned to evade doing a service; no braggart boast, or vain, false word of any kind, has ever been known upon my lips! Then let me call your attention to the fact, that these charges are brought by two men who have already, for the same purpose at which they are aiming now, contrived the most false, villanous, and deceitful schemes, and have not scrupled—the one, who was once a French gentleman, and the other, who was, and ever has been, a base miscreant—to violate every principle of truth. I refer, sire, to the character of this Italian witness as sent to you by the Maréchal de Brissac; and, putting his testimony out of the question, I say that my word against that of the Count de Meyrand must weigh down the scale, and send his up to the beam."

"What you say is so far true," replied the king. "You have a name for truth, Monsieur de Rohan, which goes some way, but cannot do everything against direct, and evidently unpremeditated testimony. I told you yesterday that if, on any provocation whatsoever, you drew your sword upon the Count de Meyrand, you should be punished in the way which you recollect I mentioned; and I feel strongly disposed to pronounce that sentence upon you at once."

"Sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, "you would do me cruel wrong."

"One word more, Monsieur de Masseran," said the

king. "Think you it possible, from what you saw, that Monsieur de Rohan went out to give a serenade to Mademoiselle de Brienne?"

"Impossible, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran; "for he was quite at the other end of the palace, of which your majesty may easily satisfy yourself."

"Now, sir," said the monarch, turning to Bernard de Rohan, "have you aught to say why I should not at once pronounce the sentence I threatened against you?"

"Simply this, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, "that I have a witness who can prove all these facts; but, before I call upon him, I must have his permission to do so. I hope it can be obtained. I trust it can, but—"

"This sounds like an evasion, sir," said the king; "yet—"

"It is an evasion, sir," interrupted the Lord of Masseran, thinking that he perceived a wavering in the king's mind; "but let me tell Monsieur de Rohan, that, even should your majesty's kindness and generosity suffer him to evade the punishment on the present occasion, I have a charge against him that he cannot evade; a charge deep, horrible, detestable, which brought me hither to your majesty in haste this morning."

"You must reserve it, sir," said the king, "till I have decided the matter before me; even then my time is, I fear, too short to attend to you for above a moment. With you, Monsieur de Meyrand, I shall deal at once. You have acknowledged that you sent this challenge. You, therefore, are the first aggressor, and I banish you from the court for ever. Retire to your own estates, keep yourself there quiet, and think of every step you take; there will be an unslumbering eye upon you which you cannot escape. Keep yourself there, and never show yourself in my presence again. For you, Monsieur de Rohan, my sentence must be pronounced conditionally. If the tale that you have told be true, you could not well avoid defending your own life, and, therefore, I tell you that if you can prove you did not first draw your sword, by proofs that can admit of no doubt, I will annul your sentence; but till then I say that the hand of Isabel de Brienne shall never be yours, so long as I wear the crown of France. My word is said, and it shall be inviolable, upon my honour."

Bernard de Rohan bowed low with some sadness upon his brow, but not exactly with despair. The

Count de Meyrand, though his sentence was a bitter one, thought with feelings of consolation that he had ruined his rival. "He can never prove that," he thought, for the dauphin's back was turned.

The only one who spoke was the Lord of Masseran. "Suffer him not to depart, I beseech you, sire," he said, seeing that Bernard de Rohan had taken a step back, as if to retire. "There is a charge against him to which all that has passed is as noon sunshine compared to midnight."

"What is it, sir?" said Henry, for the first time giving some attention to the Lord of Masseran's accusation. "With what do you charge him?"

"With the murder, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran, "with the deliberate murder of Henry Count of Brienne, the brother of her whom he pretends to love!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A MURMUR of astonishment broke from the various persons assembled in the king's bedchamber at the charge so boldly made by the Lord of Masseran. The king himself drew back a step as if in horror, and paused a moment ere he asked any questions in explanation of what he heard; but surprise was perhaps more strikingly displayed in the countenances of the Count de Meyrand and Bernard de Rohan himself, than in any others that the room contained.

The king broke silence first, demanding, "Have you well considered what you say, my Lord of Masseran? The charge is so serious, and, at the same time, so improbable; the crime is so utterly without any apparent motive; so contrary to the character of Monsieur de Rohan, and so incredible in his circumstances and situation, that I am compelled to ask you this question. Have you well considered what you say? Have you any strong evidence to support the charge, or do you make it merely upon suspicion?"

"I make it, sire, upon proof positive," replied the Lord of Masseran. "Proof which leaves no doubt to my mind; which I think will be fully satisfactory to your

majesty, and perfectly sufficient for the judges of the land."

"What do you say, Monsieur de Rohan!" demanded the king, turning towards him with a look from which he could not banish, even yet, an expression of astonishment and horror. "What have you to say, sir, to this charge!"

"I have to say, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, "simply that I am accused falsely of a great crime by a bad man. There is nothing else that I can say on the subject, not having the slightest idea of what can have suggested such a suspicion to the mind of this foreign calumniator."

"There is no calumny, sire—there is no suspicion," said the Lord of Masseran. "I am ready this moment to put an end to all such vain words by bringing forward the proofs in your majesty's presence, and then it will be seen who is the calumniator."

"This is too important an affair to be decided here," said the king. "Half an hour hence, in the great audience chamber, I will hear the whole. Prévôt, remove Monsieur de Rohan, and suffer him to hold communication with no one. Take him at once to the audience chamber. I will follow after."

The unfortunate young cavalier turned to depart under the guard of the prévôt, merely saying, "I trust to your majesty's sense of justice not to enter into the charge against me without my presence."

"You shall have all justice, Monsieur de Rohan," replied the king. "My Lord of Masseran, Monsieur de Meyrand, leave me for the time. I will investigate this matter shortly."

Conscious innocence and a strong true heart did certainly afford Bernard de Rohan great support in this moment of difficulty and grief; but they could not remove a feeling of deep depression which had suddenly come over him, and which seemed to be, as it were, the substance of that melancholy whereof the shadow had fallen upon him on his first entrance into France. It appeared as if, at every step he took forward, some fresh load was cast upon his head; as if, at every difficulty he surmounted, new and more terrible obstacles rose up before him. He quitted the king's apartment with a firm, slow step, and with an upright, though a frowning brow; but despondency was heavy at his heart; and while, de-

tained in the great audience chamber, with his arms crossed upon his chest, he waited the coming of the king, he felt that the prince's appearance would be but the commencement of new sorrow and anguish to himself.

In the mean time, the Lord of Masseran and the Count de Meyrand, as if to enjoy their triumph, walked up and down at the other end of the hall, conversing rapidly and eagerly together, and from time to time turning a grave and somewhat scornful look towards the spot where their victim stood. To make the mortification the greater, too, numbers of the noblemen and gentlemen of the court looked in, and gazed upon him in silence from time to time, as the rumour spread through the palace; and then, to crown all, he heard the voice of Isabel herself, in tones which spoke evidently that she had heard the whole bitter tale, beseeching admittance to him she loved, and persevering in her request, though frequently denied by the guard at the door.

"Pray tell her, Monsieur le Prévôt," said Bernard de Rohan, with his heart wrung and aching, at the very sound of that sweet voice which was so dear to him, "pray tell her that if she were admitted, you could not let her speak to me. I will stand here while you go, without uttering a word to any one, upon my honour."

The prévôt hesitated for an instant, but then left his side, and spoke for a moment or two with Isabel at the door. She made no reply, and Bernard de Rohan thought that she had retired. But it was not so; for in about ten minutes the doors were thrown open by the ushers, with the announcement of "The king! the king!" and in an instant after, though Bernard de Rohan could not see what passed in the corridor beyond, he again heard Isabel's voice in the tones of entreaty, and it seemed to him that every now and then tears and sobs broke in upon utterance. Henry's voice replied, speaking to her evidently in a soothing tone, though the words he used could not be heard. At length it seemed that he moved on saying, in a louder voice as he came forward, "Since you desire it, it shall be so, if it be needful to remove him from this place. Retire to the queen's cabinet in the mean while. I will not deceive you, lady, though I think you are wrong."

The words were still upon his lips as he entered the

room, followed by a number of the nobles of the court, and accompanied by his second son Charles.

"Where is the dauphin?" asked Bernard de Rohan of the prévôt, in a low tone, while Henry seated himself, and the gentlemen formed themselves into a semicircle at the top of the room.

"He was sent by his majesty to Paris at an early hour this morning," replied the prévôt, in the same low voice.

"My Lord of Masseran, Monsieur de Rohan, come forward," said the king, with an expression of much gloom and severity on his countenance; and, having spoken, he looked down on his footstool for a moment or two in silence, while the accuser and the accused approached nearer. Then raising his head with an air of much majesty, he addressed the Savoyard. "Monsieur de Masseran," he said, "before you speak one word more, let me give you a caution, and point out to you in what position you yourself stand; for, in dealing an equal measure of justice to all, I have to recollect what motive may exist in your peculiar situation to influence your conduct towards the person whom you now accuse. I have thought over the whole circumstances which are already known, and I find that there is a strong enmity previously existing, on your part, towards the Baron de Rohan. I find, in the first place—for these things must now be openly declared—that some two years ago, Monsieur de Rohan, then serving with great distinction in Italy, discovered some correspondence between yourself, professing to be an adherent of France, and our enemy, Philip, king of Spain. This he laid before the Maréchal de Brissac, believing it to be of a treasonable kind. You, sir, explained away the meaning of that correspondence; but still suspicions have been entertained of you; and I am informed by the Maréchal de Brissac himself, that he found it needful, not many weeks ago, to send Monsieur de Rohan to you, with an intimation that if you did not cease the correspondence which you held with the enemies of France, he should be obliged to occupy your territories on both sides of the mountains, and put you under personal restraint. On this occasion you avoided seeing Monsieur de Rohan; laid, it would appear, a trap for him; arrested him immediately after a clandestine marriage with Mademoiselle de Brienne, and threw him

into a dungeon. The tower above that dungeon was set on fire—I trust, accidentally—and that which was supposed to have caused the death of Monsieur de Rohan, it would seem, enabled him to escape. He appeared here at court, frustrated all your designs of wedding your lady's daughter to the Count de Meyrand, and now you suddenly bring a charge against him of having murdered the young Count of Brienne. Now, let me ask you, is not this accusation very like a part of an arranged system? At all events, one thing is made clear, which is, that you have long entertained strong and bitter enmity towards the Baron de Rohan, and therefore your charge loses much force from the apparent motive by which you are actuated. Consider this well, and take care what you do; for be sure that if you persevere in doing wrong, the matter shall be now investigated to the very bottom."

"I desire no better, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran. "My enmity—perhaps I may call it my antipathy—to Monsieur de Rohan I wish in no degree to conceal. I love him not, I never have loved him. Take my accusation, therefore, at no more than it is worth; but I make that accusation not lightly nor unjustly. The facts have so lately come to my knowledge, that I have had no time to form or fabricate a tale, to seek for evidence, or devise plans of turning the death of this poor youth to the purposes of my revenge. I accuse this gentleman, Bernard de Rohan, of having murdered, in cold blood, his friend Henry de Brienne, in the forest which extends between the small village of Leissard and the river Ain, as near as I can calculate, some ten days ago; but for all the small particulars I must refer your majesty to those from whom I myself have received the information. I have not yet had space to make myself master of all the facts; and, therefore, if I speak to minute things, I may very likely fall into some of those trifling errors which, with the prejudice that now exists against me, may hereafter be regarded as contradictions or acts of prevarication."

"How, then, do you intend to proceed, Monsieur de Masseran?" demanded the king. "Who are these people that you speak of?"

"In the first place, sire," continued the Lord of Masseran, "I will beseech you to call to your presence any one of my servants that may happen to be at hand. I

have kept myself to this chamber since I left your majesty, in order that, by holding no communication with any of them, their testimony may be free from suspicion."

"Order one of the Lord of Masseran's servants to appear," said the king, speaking to an usher. "I think you said, my lord," Henry continued, "that there is none in particular whom you would call more than another."

The Lord of Masseran bowed his head, and waited in silence for the return of the messenger, who soon appeared, accompanied by one of the Italian servants, whom he had chosen out of three or four. As soon as the man had approached the king's presence so near as to be heard distinctly, his master demanded, "Do you recollect my sending away Geronimo on any message lately?"

"Yes, my lord," replied the servant; "it was on Wednesday week last."

"Did you hear where I sent him, and on what business?" his lord continued. "If so, tell the king."

"You sent him, my lord, I heard," replied the man, "to seek for the young count, and give him a packet from you. He was to find him somewhere between Lyons and the frontier."

"If I mistake not," said the Lord of Masseran, "you were the man who brought Geronimo back to my chamber on his return?"

"No, sir," answered the attendant; "but I was standing at the postern door when he arrived, and helped him to dismount under the archway, for he was very stiff and tired."

"Tell the king exactly," said the Lord of Masseran, "at what hour and when he did arrive."

"I think it was at half past five this morning," replied the man. "It might be a quarter to six, but not more."

"To what does all this tend, my Lord of Masseran?" asked the king, somewhat impatiently. "The history of your courier is surely of no avail here."

"Of much, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran. "Your majesty was pleased to declare that my accusation came before you under circumstances of suspicion. I now show you the whole train by which my information has been accidentally received, that no such suspicion may attach to the evidence. However, enough of

this! You have heard that I sent a courier named Geronimo, some ten days since, to bear a packet from my wife and myself to the young Count of Brienne, and that he returned an hour before I sought your presence. Now shall you hear the tale he bore me, and from his own lips. Let my courier, Geronimo, be called."

Some minutes elapsed ere the man appeared, and all present kept silence, while Bernard de Rohan, standing firm and erect on the king's right hand, gazed sternly upon the Lord of Masseran, who, on his part, bent down his eyes and bit his lips, looking far more like the accused than the accuser during the whole time of the messenger's absence.

At length the Italian who had been sent for came; and certainly his appearance was not calculated to win confidence by the eye. He was, it is true, not only a very tall and powerful, but a remarkably handsome man, of that peculiar kind of beauty which is only to be found in Italy. The features were small and finely formed; the skin, though of a brown hue, was smooth and rosy; the mouth very beautiful, the eye large and brilliant. It was a countenance which might have been called effeminate, perhaps, had it not been for the dark, black, curling beard and mustache. The expression, however, more than counterbalanced everything that nature had done to make that head as fine a one as ever sculptor chiselled. The habitual contraction of the brow rendered it sullen and inauspicious of look; the unsteady eyes, now cast down or turned aside, now gleaming out from beneath the heavy overhanging eyebrows, like those of the tiger about to spring, seemed to speak insincerity, cunning, and fierceness as plainly as ever the face of man expressed any of the passions of his heart; and the close setting of his teeth, which were heard to jar against each other by those who stood near, ere he answered any question, impressed the spectators with no very great idea of his sincerity.

On the present occasion, however, he told his tale with greater facility, straightforwardness, and frankness than perhaps he had ever been known to display in performing such a task before; and from the manner in which the Lord of Masseran conducted the inquiry, an impression grew upon the king's mind that no collusion of any kind did exist between him and his servant.

"Come forward! come forward, Geronimo!" he said, as the man hung back after entering the hall, "come forward, and tell his majesty the history of this unfortunate business concerning Monsieur de Brienne."

"I have nothing to tell but that he is dead, sir," replied the man. "That he was killed in the forest by Cerdon. I don't mean to say who killed him: I don't know."

"Nay, nay, Geronimo," said the Lord of Masseran, "that is by no means sufficient. You must let the king hear the whole facts as I have heard them. Relate what occurred when I sent you with the packet to Monsieur de Brienne."

"Why, sir, according to your orders," replied the man, "I rode as hard as I could to the Pont d'Ain, and then to Nantua, where I found the young gentleman had been not very long before, and I made inquiries to trace his route, and went after him."

"How far did you gain information of his road?" demanded the king.

"Why, I had to guess a good deal of it, your majesty," answered the man. "The master of the house at Nantua could not tell me whether he had gone to Cerdon or to Leissard; however, he had heard him say that he intended to turn his steps towards Bourg at all events. To Cerdon I went then—"

"Why to Cerdon?" demanded the king, sharply. "If he were going to Bourg, why should you seek him at Cerdon?"

"Because, may it please your majesty," replied the man, "the people at Nantua told me that there had been messengers coming and going between their house and Cerdon, and that a companion of the young lord had remained at the latter place while he had come on to Nantua. I thought it likely, therefore, and they thought so too, that he might have gone to Cerdon first; so I took the post, and rode thither as fast as I could go."

"And there you heard of his murder, I suppose?" said the Lord of Masseran.

"No, my lord, no," replied the man. "I did not hear of his murder for long after that."

"Let the man go on with his tale, my lord," said the king, speaking to the Lord of Masseran. "What happened at Cerdon, sir? Go on with your story."

"At first the horseboys and the chamberlain told me

that the young count had gone on to Nantua, and that they knew nothing more about him; but the good woman of the inn came out, and told me that there had been a gentleman waiting there for the young lord all the night, just one day before I came, and that she had heard a messenger coming from Nantua tell her lodger —whose name she found from his servant was Bernard de Rohan—that the Count of Brienne had taken the road to Leissard."

The king turned his eyes for a moment to the countenance of Bernard de Rohan, who replied to the look by saying, "It is perfectly true, sire. Everything he has said hitherto, I doubt not, may be relied on."

"That is satisfactory, at least," said the king. "Go on, my good friend. What did the woman tell you more?"

"She said, your majesty," answered Geronimo, "that the gentleman had seemed very angry at this news; and, jumping upon his horse, which was ready saddled, he set off with his servant towards Leissard at full speed. Well, your majesty, I followed the same way, thinking that I should overtake them all at Bourg, or, at the worst, at Macon; but, however, I thought it best to inquire as I went; and when I came to Leissard, and found there was nothing but a little sort of *répue* there for an inn, I only stayed to water my horse, and asked the woman of the house if there had been two such gentlemen there as I described. She answered that there had been just such a pair about the same time on the day before, or somewhat earlier, and that a servant was with them. I then asked her if she were very sure, when she answered, Yes, she was sure enough, for that they had been quarrelling, and giving each other hard words about something, she did not well know what, and that she had begged them to be peaceable. After that I left her, and rode on as hard as I could towards Bourg. A few miles on farther, however, as your majesty knows, towards Ceyserat, one passes the Ain by the bridge, where there is a toll-keeper under the Lord of Ceyserat; and, I don't know why, as I was giving him the two deniers for my horse and myself, I asked him if he had seen the two gentlemen and their servant that passed the day before. He said he had not; that one gentleman and one servant had passed, but not two. I said he must be mistaken;

and thereat he grew angry, and told me that I wanted to get him into evil repute with his lord—"

"May I ask him one question, your majesty?" said Bernard de Rohan.

"Certainly," answered the monarch. "Everything that can tend to make the matter clearer must be done."

"In telling you that a gentleman and his servant passed at that hour, without another," said Bernard de Rohan, "the toll-keeper was right. But did he not tell you that a second gentleman passed soon after?"

"No, he did not," replied the man; "but, on the contrary, he assured me that no one had passed till towards night, when two carts returned from Leissard; one a peasant's cart from the mill higher up the river, with the lad that drove it, and the other a cart which had been carrying goods from Ceyserat to Leissard; with it were two people, a young lad from Ceyserat, and a servant-maid going to Bourg. These, he swore, were all the people who had passed during that day. I marked the whole thing that he told me well, because I was somewhat anxious about the young count."

"And why were you anxious?" demanded Henry.

"Because," answered the man, "the good woman at Leissard had told me the two gentlemen had quarrelled, and that she thought they would have fought. I, moreover, told the man that I was anxious about the young gentleman, and asked him what I had best do, when he said the best thing to do would be to go on to Ceyserat, and make inquiry there; for that there was a ford lower down where the count might, perhaps, have crossed. I accordingly rode on; but, though I could hear of the one gentleman and his servant all the way to Bourg, and I found that his name was Bernard de Rohan, I could hear nothing of the Count de Brienne; and, getting more perplexed, I went back again, crossed the bridge, and with some people I hired to help me from the mill, was tracking my way back to Leissard; when, about half way there, I saw a road that seemed to lead down through the wood, as if towards the river. On inquiry, I found that it brought one to the ford, and we rode down it to see if we could discover anything there. We soon came upon the track of horses' feet: two going and one coming back. A little farther on we came to an open space, where, the road being of white sand, we found it a good deal broken up with men's

footmarks, as if there had been a struggle. There, too, was some blood upon the ground; not much, but enough to make a good stain. We could not track it in any way, however, from the spot; but, in looking about, we saw that the footmarks of one horse went on towards the ford; so that, thinking it sure, even if there had been a quarrel and a wound given, that the young count had crossed the river and gone on, I determined to do so likewise. The men who were with me were forced to go back to their work; so, after directing me how best to ford, and seeing me do it, they went their way and I pursued mine; but now all my inquiries proved in vain during two days, till at length, towards night on the second day, I came to a cottage, somewhere between Cerdon and Tossiat, where I found that the people had caught a horse which had been roaming about, saddled and bridled, but without a rider."

"Were there any stains of blood about the housings?" demanded the king, eagerly.

"None, sire, whatever," replied the man, at once; "but this awakened all my suspicions again; and, going back to Leissard, I got a number of people, determined to search the forest where I had seen the blood from end to end. It took us three quarters of a day before we found what we sought; but then, your majesty, a dog which was with one of the men suddenly flew at something among a pile of brambles at the foot of one of the trees, upon which a large she-wolf started out and ran off as hard as she could. One of the men put back the bushes to see where she had been lying, and there we had it all before us."

There was a dead silence, and every one pressed a little forward, not excepting Bernard de Rohan himself, to listen eagerly to that which was to follow.

"What was it that you beheld?" demanded the king, after the Italian had paused for an instant.

"The sand partly scratched away," replied the man, "and partly covering a dead body which the wolf had been gnawing. We all went up and got the corpse out of the earth easily, for it was but thinly covered in any place, and there lay the young count, having been dead seemingly three or four days."

"Might not the wolves have killed him?" demanded the king, in a low but eager voice.

"No, your majesty," answered Geronimo. "In the

first place, if they killed him, they must have buried him too; but, in the next place, though he was very much gnawed, as you may see by that glove"—and, drawing forth a thick buckskin glove, embroidered in gold on the back with a count's coronet, and the letters "H. de B.," he laid it before the king—"yet on his right side, which they had not touched, was a deep sword-wound that must have caused his death. His clothes were torn a good deal by the wolves, and there was some blood upon them, but not much. We got help directly, and took the body to Bourg, where it was necessary to bury it soon. After that, I stayed a little to collect what information I could, but no other tidings of any kind were to be got; and the Lord of Ceyserat having promised to send after me one of the persons who were with me when we found the body, I came on hither to tell my lord the whole story. This is all I have to say, sir."

"A sad tale, indeed," said the king, while everybody silently and slowly drew back from Bernard de Rohan, and left him standing alone in the monarch's presence.

Henry looked down thoughtfully for a moment or two, and then raised his eyes to the face of the young nobleman, saying, "This is a most painful and distressing business, and one somewhat difficult to deal with. Although there is nothing proved to attach the deed absolutely to you, Monsieur de Rohan, yet the circumstances of suspicion are far too strong for me to suffer you to remain at liberty. Understand that I do not wish to prejudge a matter which lawful judges appointed for that purpose must investigate more fully; and I say again distinctly, that as yet there is not sufficient evidence to attach this deed absolutely to you—"

"But, sire," exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, "I have not yet by any means concluded the case against Monsieur de Rohan. Let his own servant be sent for—the one who was with him—and let him say whether his lord did not accompany Henry of Brienne till within a few minutes of his death. Let him tell all that he saw and heard, and you will then find that there is more than suspicion attaches to Monsieur de Rohan. I saw that servant myself this very morning, and made inquiries concerning the terrible affair now before your majesty. May he not be sent for?"

"Certainly," replied the king. "Let him be brought hither."

The man was accordingly sent for; and Bernard de Rohan was about to speak in the interim, but the king stopped him, saying, "You had better, Monsieur de Rohan, suffer the case of your accuser to be fully brought to an end before you say anything."

"As your majesty pleases," replied Bernard de Rohan. "The matter, as far as I am concerned, is perfectly straightforward. I have nothing to do but to display to you every part of my conduct exactly as it happened. But, however, I bow to your majesty's pleasure, and will wait till my attendant, Pierre Millort, has been examined; only adding, that no one can feel more grief and horror at this sad event than I do."

The pause was somewhat long, for the man was found with difficulty; and the king conversed in a low voice with several of those around him, seeming to gather the opinion of the persons in whom he could best confide regarding the case before him, while Bernard de Rohan and the Lord of Masseran stood silently confronting each other; and again the persons around remarked in their demeanour the extraordinary reverse of expression which we have before noticed, Bernard de Rohan bearing the firm, steadfast, determined aspect of the accuser, and the Lord of Masseran looking dully down upon the ground, as if labouring under some heavy charge which he could not repel.

At length Pierre Millort was brought into the audience chamber, and many eyes were instantly fixed upon him. He was pale, agitated, almost trembling, and, in circumstances where frank sincerity and calm firmness of mind were most wanting, it was evident that everything like courage and resolution had causelessly abandoned him. His very look of guilt and hesitation created a universal feeling of doubt and suspicion, not only against him, but against his master.

"Stand forward, sir!" said the king, in a sharp tone, "stand forward! Now look me in the face, and answer the questions asked you. Are you a servant of the Baron de Rohan?"

"Yes, sire, I am, may it please your majesty," replied the man, in a faltering voice. "A poor, faithful domestic, your majesty, born upon his own estates, and—and—"

"Speak out, sir!" said Bernard de Rohan. "Take courage! You, at least, have no cause to fear. An-

swer every question truly and sincerely as it is asked you, and conceal nothing on any account."

"Did you accompany your master," said the Lord of Masseran, "some seven or eight days ago, from Cerdon to Leissard?"

The man hesitated, and then replied, in a low and scarcely audible tone, "That he did not well know the names of the places."

"Pierre Millort!" exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, angry and indignant at the man's prevarication, "Pierre Millort, you are speaking a falsehood. You know perfectly well that you did accompany me from Cerdon to Leissard."

The servant turned an anxious and imploring look upon his master, as if he would have said, "Pray do not you also join with them. I am doing the best I can for you." But, at the same time, he replied aloud, "I believe those were the names of the places, my lord; but I thought I was to be very strict in everything I said."

"In telling the plain truth, sir!" said the king. "Now answer the Lord of Masseran's question directly. Did you accompany your master from Cerdon to Leissard?"

"I believe those were the names of the places, your majesty," replied the man.

"Did your master overtake anybody at Leissard," demanded the Lord of Masseran, "or in its neighbourhood?"

It was impossible, however, to get the truth at once from weak Pierre Millort. He affected to misunderstand, declaring that they had overtaken a number of carts and market-people; and when at length brought to the point by a question which he could not evade, as to whether his master had joined the young Count de Brienne at Leissard, he hesitated for some little time, as if doubting whether to answer the truth or not. When pressed by farther interrogations regarding the demeanour of the two young gentlemen, and what had become of the young Count of Brienne, he deviated into direct falsehood, declaring that they had seemed perfectly good friends, and that they had parted amicably at the corner of one of the roads. Bernard de Rohan looked down and bit his lip, while the small, keen eyes of the Lord of Masseran seemed to dart flames of fire at the attendant of his enemy.

"I vow before Heaven," cried the Savoyard, at length, "that the account given me by this very man, not two hours ago, was as different from the tale he now tells as light from darkness!"

"Most likely, my Lord of Masseran," said Bernard de Rohan, interposing, in a clear, firm voice, "most likely what the man told you this morning, when he thought his lord in no danger, was true; for certainly what he has said now, under a foolish belief that deceit can be of service to a good cause, is utterly false, and he knows it to be so. Sire," he continued, turning to the king, "if your majesty would have heard me but now, I would have saved you the trouble of dealing with this foolish person, by telling you the whole truth, exactly as it stands, without evasion, hesitation, or fear. Strong in my innocence, I have no occasion for concealment of any kind. All that the Lord of Masseran, all that his servant has reported up to the period of my quitting Leissard in company with Henry de Brienne, is perfectly true."

"That is candid, at least," said the king, with an approving bend of the head. "Go on, Monsieur de Rohan."

"After quitting Leissard," continued the young cavalier, "there comes a period which neither of them knows anything about, but which that man, Pierre Millort, might have related if he had not chosen to play the fool and the liar. Angry words took place between Henry de Brienne and myself almost as soon as we met. I reproached him for not having acted fairly by me, in deviating from our plan of seeking his sister together; and he replied angrily, I may almost say madly, for I can see no motive for his conduct. This dispute continued for some way along the road, till at length, in a fit of violent passion, he declared he would separate from me altogether, and darted down the by-way which probably leads to the ford the Italian has mentioned. Now comes a period which no one knows but myself, since what we have heard to-day shows that the only other person who did know it is, alas! no more."

Bernard de Rohan paused, with a look of sadness, for a moment, and every head stooped a little forward, and every ear was bent to listen. "After considering for a moment," said Bernard de Rohan, "grieved to see him in such a state, for I had been trying in vain to

sooth him, I resolved to make one more effort not to part in anger with the brother of her I loved, and I rode after him as fast as possible. I overtook him at the sandy opening of which the Italian has spoken, and found him dismounted from his horse, and taking out a stone which had stuck in the animal's foot. He turned upon me furiously, seeming to regard my coming after him as an insult. Though the only words I spoke were intended to sooth and calm him, they seemed but to irritate him the more; and, casting from him my proffered hand, he drew his sword upon me—"

Bernard de Rohan paused, and the king exclaimed, "You fought, and he fell!"

"No, sire," replied the young cavalier, firmly and emphatically, "no! We did not. I put aside his sword, grasping the blade with my hand; and then, telling him, that if such were his feelings, I would follow him no farther, but trust to time and reflection to change them towards me, I left him, and returned slowly to the spot where I had left my servant on the road. As I turned away from Henry de Brienne, he said something which I did not stay to hear; but he seemed somewhat saddened and rebuked, and the only words I caught implied that he had been put upon a task which would drive him mad."

"Pray why did you not remain when you saw him soothed?" demanded the king, gazing at the young cavalier somewhat sternly.

"Because, sire, I feared my own temper and his," replied Bernard de Rohan. "He was always impetuous, vehement, and passionate, and often disposed to quarrel with his best friends when he was in any difficulty, rather than explain the nature of it to them. For my own part, his words and actions had both been insulting to me; I would have borne such from no other living man; and though, for his sister's sake, I had endured them, I feared to trust myself with one who, in ten minutes more, might repeat them all with aggravation. This, sire, is all I have to tell. After leaving him, I pursued my search for Isabel; but finding that she had sought your majesty's protection, I followed hither with all speed."

The king gazed thoughtfully upon the countenance of the young cavalier for some minutes, and then, turning away, walked slowly to the door of a small cabinet,

which communicated with the western side of the room, saying, as he did so, "Vieilleville, come hither with me. The rest wait till my return." As soon as the door was closed, he demanded, "What think you of all this, Vieilleville? His words are spoken like truth."

"I fear, sire, that the case is a very clear one," replied the maréchal. "As you may remember, you sent this unhappy young count to seek for his sister, and bring her to Paris, with an express injunction to separate her from poor De Rohan. On this, depend upon it, they have quarrelled—most likely in the way he himself describes. But the event is clear; one is dead, the other wounded in the hand! De Rohan, knowing well that, if he acknowledges the deed, he puts an eternal barrier between himself and her he loves, has concealed the death of his rash young adversary, and now is in some sort compelled to maintain the same story. It is a sad affair, indeed, but I do not think at all mysterious."

"My own conclusion is the same as yours," replied the king; "but, though we may pity, we must not let justice be turned aside, and I fear I must send him to his trial."

"It must be so, I fear, sire," replied the maréchal; "then, if any extenuating circumstances appear, or if he confess the matter as a casual rencounter, you can pardon him."

"I think not," replied Henry, somewhat sternly. "Those chance rencounters are but excuses for murder, Vieilleville. Have I not often declared, that an act so committed, without due witnesses, shall be rewarded with death? However, he has not confessed, and he stands upon his innocence. By his own plea he must be tried; but there is no doubt, I think, that a sufficient case is made out against him to send him to prison. I grieve deeply, for I do believe that a nobler gentleman does not live in France, and certainly a better and more promising soldier has not appeared in our day. Nevertheless, it cannot be helped; and I must be the more resolute on account of the very pain it gives me. Whither shall I send him: to the Bastille?"

"No, sire," replied De Vieilleville: "by so doing it will give quite another air to his offence: that cannot be properly assigned to any but prisoners of state. This gentleman, sire, is accused of common homicide; and for him the ordinary prison of the Châtelet is the only

place, notwithstanding his rank, character, and station."

"We will make no exception in favour of rank," said the king; "and as for the rest, we must judge, from the result of the trial, of what is his amount of guilt. Come, then, De Vieilleville; it is a painful task, but the sooner it is over the better."

Thus saying, the king returned into the audience chamber; and, moving slowly through the number of courtiers there assembled, took his seat in the chair where he usually received the ministers of foreign states. Every one was eager to hear the first words that he pronounced, although the heavy sternness of his brow announced sufficiently the nature of his decision. "Monsieur de Rohan," he said, at length, "it is with deep regret that I have to inform you, after patiently hearing your own statement, the charge against you, and the proofs of that charge, that I am obliged to acknowledge such reasonable cause of suspicion does exist in this case as to compel me to send you to confinement for trial by your lawful judges. I hope and trust that you will be able to prove your innocence; but I would exhort you most earnestly to consider well what you are about; and if, in truth, anger and provocation have induced you to commit a minor offence than that of which you are accused, to confess at once that it is so, and have recourse to mercy rather than appeal to justice."

"Sire, I thank you most deeply," replied Bernard de Rohan, "for your kindness and condescension. I acknowledge fully that your decision in sending me to trial is perfectly just. The case of suspicion made out is sufficiently strong. It may be stronger still; it may even go far enough to convince honest and honourable judges that I am guilty, though I am most innocent. Nevertheless, sire, no fear on earth shall ever induce my tongue to tell a falsehood; to say that I have done that which I have not done, or acknowledge a crime that is repugnant to my whole feelings. I declare most solemnly that the statement which I have made to your majesty is perfectly true and accurate; and from that statement I will never vary in the slightest degree, let the result be what it may."

"May it appear that you are innocent!" said the king, rising.

But the Lord of Masseran, who had a keen and eager desire of seeing everything secured which would render the condemnation of Bernard de Rohan certain, interposed, exclaiming, "Were it not necessary, sire, to make sure of the person of this honest servant of this honest master, good Pierre Millort, who this morning told me one story, and, an hour after, gave your majesty another? Contradicted by his own lord, and convicted of notorious falsehood, he may well, before a few hours are over, manufacture a new history to regale the ears of the judges."

"That must not be," replied the king, "that must not be. Prévôt, look to him also; and in half an hour convey the prisoners hence, and hand them both over to the proper officers of the Châtelet, to wait judgment according to law. Let the room be cleared of all but the prisoners and the prévôt, who shall soon have farther orders."

Thus saying, the king passed out of the audience hall, followed slowly by the various members of the court, while Bernard de Rohan remained with his eyes gazing upon the ground, and feeling heavily the hand of fate upon him.

CHAPTER IX.

The heart of Bernard de Rohan sunk for a moment under the weight that oppressed it. It was one of those instants when "the whole head is heavy and the whole heart is sad;" when the joys gone by render present pangs but the more bitter; when we seem to be pressed upon, on every side, by rushing thoughts, each more agonizing than another, pouring in on all sides from the past and from the future, crushing resolution and extinguishing hope. It was an instant when—as in one of those painful dreams where our corporeal strength lies prostrate, where the voice cannot cry for help, nor the feet struggle, nor the hands fight—every effort of the mind seems vain under the benumbing weight which misfortune casts upon us.

With Bernard de Rohan, however, such a state lasted but a short time; and it was the thought of Isabel de

Brienne that recalled him to himself. "She will be here!" he murmured: "I heard the king's promise! I know what it meant!" and, though he felt that the meeting would be terrible, yet he felt, also, that to leave her, perhaps for ever, without that meeting would be more terrible still. To make it as little painful to her as possible was his next determination; to sooth her, to calm, to encourage her with hope, and to hide from her carefully, for the time, the dark and horrible conviction which he himself felt, that there was a great, a strong probability of his condemnation; that there was a chance of every suspicion against him being aggravated rather than diminished by investigation.

"It will come upon her by degrees," he thought. "If it all falls on her at once—the tidings of her brother's death and the prospect of my destruction—it will overwhelm her utterly."

He had had but a few minutes for such considerations, when the latch of the door was raised, and he turned to welcome her. He was deceived, however. One of the ushers entered, and, beckoning to the prévôt, spoke to him for a moment or two on the other side of the room. What was said Bernard de Rohan did not hear; but at length the prévôt said, "Very well. Place an archer at each door, then, and come back when it is gone."

The usher disappeared, and in a minute or two again looked in.

"Monsieur de Rohan," said the prévôt, as soon as he saw him, "I am commanded to leave you here, for half an hour, with some one who wishes to speak to you. At the end of that time, however, you must be prepared to depart, without fail; nor will you regard me ill for requiring your interview to be brought at once to a close."

Bernard de Rohan signified his assent, and the prévôt, beckoning away the young nobleman's ill-judging servant, Pierre Millort, left him alone. His heart beat eagerly, but the suspense lasted only for a moment. He heard steps approaching the instant after, and Isabel entered, pale certainly as death, her bright eyes wild and eager, though tearless, but still most beautiful, and to his heart most beloved. She paused to gaze at him for a single instant, while he asked himself, "Is it possible that she can doubt my innocence?"

Her next movement answered that question at once; for, seeing that he paused, and gazed at her sadly and inquiringly, she sprang forward and cast herself upon his bosom.

"Dear, dear Isabel," he said, "this is very terrible, my beloved; terrible in every way to be torn from you thus at all—to be accused of a horrible crime—to be suspected, even, of a crime that must separate me from you for ever—to be doomed to ignominious imprisonment and trial; and, above all, to be taken away from you at a moment when you so much need consolation and comfort. All, all is terrible, almost beyond endurance. But tell me, Isabel, tell me, as some relief, tell me that you do not believe me guilty."

"Guilty!" she exclaimed. "You guilty, Bernard, of killing my brother! You guilty of raising your hand against Henry de Brienne! Oh, no! Those who suspect you know little of you; or, rather, they judge from their own base hearts."

"Nay, nay, my beloved," he replied, "let us not do them injustice. They have many causes for suspicion. The circumstances are certainly extraordinary—peculiar—dark. You have not heard all the particulars that appear against me."

"Yes, yes, I have," replied Isabel. "Good Father Willand has been with me in the queen's cabinet, and, mingling among the crowd behind you while the investigation lasted, has brought me the tidings from time to time. I believe all that you have said, Bernard. I know it all to be true; for I know poor Henry's character, and I know yours. I can understand how it all happened. Henry was sent to separate you and me, after the edict that annulled our marriage—annulled it in the sight of man, but not in the sight of God! He promised the king, or some one else, I hear, that if he found me, he would not let us hold any communication whatsoever till we were in the king's presence. He did not like to tell you this; was, perhaps, half ashamed of the promise itself; would rather that you had found me without him; and, as was always the case with him, grew angry when he became embarrassed, and freed himself from his momentary difficulty by plunging into worse and more painful embarrassments. In the end, the frankness of his nature would have brought it all right; but, in the mean time, he doubtless did injure and insult you—"

"He did, Isabel, he did," replied Bernard de Rohan; "but, by my honour—by my love for you, dear girl—"

"I need no assurance!" she said. "Do not that wrong to my confidence, Bernard, to offer one asseveration in proof of the innocence whereof I have no doubt. You did not take the life of Henry de Brienne; you did not, you could not draw you sword upon my brother; I know it to be impossible, Bernard; I have no doubt, I have no hesitation; and God will yet make the truth to appear."

"I trust he may," answered Bernard de Rohan; "I trust he may, my Isabel! But we must not deceive ourselves," he added, the plan he had laid down for his conduct towards her being changed by the knowledge of all the circumstances which she had gained from the priest; "we must not deceive ourselves in the matter, Isabel! The circumstances, strange as they are, are full of somewhat more than even suspicion. I will own, too, that, did I hear a charge against a stranger supported by such proofs, I should myself be inclined to deem him guilty."

Isabel cast down her eyes, and, for the first time, the tears rose in them. "Oh, they do not know you! They do not know you, Bernard!" she said, at length.

"That is what I fear, Isabel," replied Bernard de Rohan. "A person charged with such a crime as this, is given over to judges who do not know him; who are not aware of all those latent thoughts, feelings, and principles in his nature, those peculiarities, which affect and modify the actions of each particular man. They may hear his general reputation from witnesses; they may be told that he has heretofore lived an honourable, upright, a humane, a gentle life, but they can know nothing of how impossible it is for men of some peculiar characters to perform the acts which are done without hesitation by others. Even if, among the judges, there be one or two who do know the person brought before them—who can judge of his principles, and from them divine his conduct—they are strictly forbidden to make the attempt, and told to judge alone by what appears before them. But, at the same time, a terrible and dangerous latitude is allowed to them, on the other hand, in supposing a connexion between events where no connexion is really proved; in supplying, from their own imagination, the broken links of a chain of what is call-

ed circumstantial evidence. This, Isabel, this is all I have to fear. No eye ever saw my sword drawn against your brother, or my hand strike the blow, for neither the one nor the other ever took place. But that I followed him into the wood—that we had quarrelled—that I was with or near him towards the very time when the deed was done, seems to be beyond a doubt. The little that is wanting will be easily supplied by fancy; and I fear, my Isabel, that no allowance will be made for a life of honour and integrity, or a name hitherto unstained and pure."

His words came cold upon the hopes that Isabel had been striving to encourage, though those hopes had been founded more upon Him who never fails than upon anything that man could do. She replied not for several minutes, but remained standing, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, and her hands resting in his, while he gazed upon her with the fond, lingering look of hopeless parting.

"There is one promise which you must make me, Isabel," he said, at length; and, in reply, she looked up with gladness, as if to promise whatever he asked were to her a joy, exclaiming,

"What is it? what is it, Bernard? You have but to tell it."

"It is, Isabel," he said, "that, whatever may be the result of the circumstances in which we are placed, whatever may be the judgment of men in regard to the charge against me, you, you will never believe me guilty; and, at all events, I appeal to God, before whose throne we shall some time meet, to justify your love and confidence. Let this, dearest, let this ever be remembered; and now, and henceforth for ever, believe me innocent, whatever may occur."

Thus saying, he clasped his arms around her; and she, weeping on his bosom, repeated again and again the promise he had required—a promise easy for her to make; for, though others might doubt, suspect, or condemn, it was impossible for her to believe him guilty.

While they were yet thus clasped in each other's arms, there were voices heard speaking at the door. "If you do not respect my gown," said some one without, "respect the king's order, at least. Look there, and let me in, if not for the cloth, for the parchment; though I don't see, for my part, why the skin should be better than the wool."

"Ah! the king's order is another affair," said the voice of an usher. "Go in, but the time is nearly expired, and the horses are coming round." Thus saying, he opened the door, and gave admission to the jovial form of Father Willand, who entered with a countenance somewhat more serious than usual, and approached the lovers as they stood together, saying,

"I am sorry to disturb you, my children, but the king has sent me, Master Bernard, to exhort you to confess; and, by my faith, he would fain put the confession into your mouth, too, and make you own that you killed this poor youth in a chance encounter. For my part, I have but one word to say to you: are you guilty?"

"I need hardly tell you I am not," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I am as innocent as you are, my good father; and, since you are here, let me beseech you to attach yourself to this dear girl; protect, support her when I, perhaps, am gone; for this storm is a heavy one, and I feel as if it would beat me down."

"Hush, hush," said Father Willand, dashing a drop from his eye. "Men are easily condemned in France, it is true; but you were born for better things than to die a dog's death. However, to the Châtelet you must go, that is clear enough; and now listen to me: there are two sorts of comfort in this world; one consists in fine airy rooms, good dishes, and soft sleeping; the other in having to do with kindly hearts, though they may show themselves in rough forms. By bribes and civil speeches to the governor of the Châtelet you may get him to put you up stairs in the great tower, and there you may get food of a better kind by paying for every mouthful; but, if you would take my advice, you would refuse all such extortions, treat the governor as a small knave, and let him put you, if he will, in one of the common cells. He dare not put you in the *oubliettes*, or the *cradle*, or the *End-of-ease*, or any of those dungeons where a prisoner may live fifteen days, but no longer; for he knows the matter will be inquired into. When I lived in Paris, many a time I used to visit the prisoners in the Châtelet, to give them the best consolation that a poor mortal like themselves could give, by telling them of things above mortality. I found that, though the turnkeys of the higher prison were held to be in station above the others, yet that the common jailer, Bertrand Saar, though in shape, look, and voice

more like a bear than a man, was warm and kind of heart, and not without a stock of comfort for all occasions. With him you will be better than the others, especially if you tell him that you have an humble friend in Father Willand. But farewell, farewell, my son; here comes the prévôt. Bear up, bear up, dear lady; we shall see better times yet."

But Isabel still clung to the breast of him she loved. She felt that they must part, but yet she could hardly command her heart to do so. Again and again she suffered her clinging arms to relax their hold; again and again she clasped them around him with the convulsive embrace of parting love; and at length, when, once more kissing her fair brow, he gently freed himself from her, she sank slowly down upon the ground where she stood, and, burying her eyes in her hands, wept aloud. She heard his receding steps; she marked the stillness that succeeded; a sickening weariness of all the things of life came over her heart; her brain grew dizzy, the blood seemed to stagnate in her veins, and a period of forgetfulness came over her, as the only relief to suffering too acute for long corporeal endurance.

CHAPTER X.

The criminal prison of the Petit Châtelet was a large, gloomy pile of building, surrounded by a fosse and walls, and having in the centre a huge shapeless tower, generally attributed, like that of the greater Châtelet, to Julius Cæsar. If any part of the building was Roman, however, the greater part of it was of a more recent date; some portions attributed, probably with justice, to the Merovingian kings of France, and some undoubtedly built by monarchs subsequent to the accession of the house of Valois.* The whole of it, however, had been blackened with time; and turret, and pinnacle, and tower, and loophole, all bore so dark and gloomy an aspect, that the very look thereof seemed to speak of suffering, and tyranny, and despair.

* See Du Laure.

A writer, who witnessed its destruction somewhat more than half a century ago, expresses a degree of joy and triumph over its fall, which marks the odium and abhorrence in which it had ever been held. "I have passed over its ruins," he says, "but what an aspect! Half-opened vaults, subterranean dungeons which received the air for the first time during so many years, seemed to disclose to the frightened eyes of the spectators the victims who had been swallowed up in their dark shades. An involuntary shudder seized one as the sight plunged down into those profound caves. 'Is it, then, in such a place,' one exclaimed, 'is it at such a place in the bosom of the earth, in a pit fit for the dead, that men have confined the living? These dungeons are about to serve, for the future, as cellars to the houses about to be built around; but the walls themselves must be still full of the sighs of despair. Who will dare to place there his tun of wine? Who will ever be able to drink it, without remembering the wretches who have groaned within those walls in torment of body and in anguish of mind more terrible still?'"

To that abode of sorrow and anguish—then, if we may use the term, in the prime of its horrors—was Bernard de Rohan brought from the gay scene at Fontainebleau. It was dark when he arrived; and, as he passed through the dull, heavy gate, the long perspective arch of which, lighted by torches, showed the extreme thickness of the wall through which it had been pierced, he felt, indeed, as if earthly hope were for ever left behind him.

The actual governor of the prison, or, rather, his lieutenant, was below in the courtyard; a number of strange, harsh faces were seen round about by the torch-light. The archers* who guarded him were all strangers; and the only familiar face that he could see on any side, as he gazed round, was that of the servant, Pierre Millort, which, as we may well suppose, was painful to him to behold.

The governor read the order for receiving the prisoners by the light of one of the torches; but then another packet, containing apparently private orders, was handed to him, which he perused with some appearance of discontent.

* It must not be supposed that these personages, though termed archers, were armed with bows and arrows.

"Here, Jean Banc," he said, calling to one of his men, "look at that."

The man read it, and then turned an inquiring glance to the face of his principal, who said a few words, ending with, "Go up to him, and see if you can make anything of him."

The man accordingly approached the young cavalier, and addressed him in a tone half sullen, half civil. "I find, sir," he said, "that we are to put you in the best part of the tower. I suppose you are not unwilling to pay for accommodation."

The words of Father Willand came back to Bernard de Rohan's mind, and he replied, "I desire in no degree to be treated otherwise than as a common prisoner. I will pay the sum appointed by law: the rest must depend upon yourselves."*

"You should be treated as a common prisoner, sure enough," replied the man, his tone increasing in sullenness, "if it depended upon us; but we have the king's order to put you in the tower;" and the governer himself, perceiving that his effort to extort money was of no avail, came forward, and went through the necessary formalities of receiving his prisoner, without addressing more words to him than necessary. He was then conducted up a small staircase to a room high up in the tower, where, at all events, he had the advantage of free air. That, however, was all; for, besides the bed, the table, and the chair that it contained, the room was vacant. There were no means of occupying a single hour: nor book, nor writing materials, nor any one article which could be employed to divert or amuse the weary mind under imprisonment and grief. The jailer put down a lamp, but retired without saying a word; and then came the harsh locking of the door, that shut the prisoner from the world without.

"I can bear it," said Bernard de Rohan, casting himself down in a chair. "I have borne imprisonment before, and worse than this."

* We find the rates of payment in the prison of the greater Châtelet thus recorded:

A count or countess	10 livres.
A knight banneret	20 sous.
A simple knight or lady	5 sous.
A squire or young lady of noble birth	12 deniers.
A Lombard	12 "
A Jew	11 sous.

But he was mistaken. He had indeed borne imprisonment before, and imprisonment of a dark and dreary nature, under circumstances of much anxiety and grief; but he had not borne imprisonment under a charge of dark and terrible crimes, with a prospect of nothing but fresh anguish, trial, condemnation, death, the loss of her he loved, the knowledge of her agony, the want of power to serve, support, or save her from the long and bitter trials she would have to sustain. All this was new to him, and all this was far more terrible than anything he had hitherto undergone. The struggle of a few hours, however, enabled him to conquer the anguish and to prepare his mind for endurance.

There is something in the capability which a resolute heart finds within itself of resisting with unquailing power the worst evils of fate and fortune, that gives a grand and sustaining consolation under each immediate infliction which nothing else can afford. Conscious virtue itself may fail under accumulated ills and wrongs; but the strong determination of bearing all unflinchingly begets in itself fresh strength, and even from many of our weaknesses, from pride, from vanity itself, obtains aid and derives vigour.

Bernard de Rohan had the consciousness of virtue, and he had also that strong resolution which is needful to make such consciousness powerful as a sustaining principle. Fate itself, he thought, shall not terrify me, anguish shall not wring anything from me; I will bear injustice and death without a word, or without a remonstrance, even unto the end. Nor did his resolution fail, though during the next three days he held no communication whatsoever with any human being, though the jailer who attended upon him came and went in silence, and refused to cheer him even by a reply to his questions.

At length, however, on the morning of the third day, he was summoned to appear before the court appointed to conduct his trial. As was then very customary, the judges were named by the king himself, a practice often abused, but which in this case had been employed rather to favour than to condemn the prisoner. The persons selected were those famous for equity and for a knowledge of the laws; and when Bernard de Rohan appeared before them, he found that all the members of the court assembled in the hall of the Châtelet were

strangers to him; but, on hearing the names of his judges, he did not find one to whom he could object.

On this occasion the hall was totally void of spectators. No one was admitted but the two guards who attended the prisoner, and the ushers at the doors. The other persons that it contained were the judges, ranged in a long row at the end of the hall, the clerks at tables below them, and one or two officers of the court standing at the ends of the benches.

The prisoner was brought forward and placed on the elevated seat called the scellette, where he was interrogated for nearly an hour by his judges, for the purpose of ascertaining, by the means of that mental torture, whether he would waver or hesitate in any part of his testimony. Nothing, however, could be elicited from him but the plain, straightforward tale which he had before told; and, the various witnesses being called in, Bernard de Rohan found himself once more confronted with the Lord of Masseran, and with his Italian servant Geronimo.

All that had been proved before was now repeated: the Italian told the same tale, and varied not in reply to the questions that were asked him. But another witness now appeared in the person of one of those who had accompanied the Italian when the dead body was found, and who corroborated the whole of the previous statement.

At length Pierre Millort was also called, and for some time interrogated strictly. Once more he displayed the same weakness that he had shown before. Simply from fear, he wavered, he hesitated, he prevaricated, he contradicted himself. His master gazed upon him sternly as he went on, wondering not a little that no observation in regard to his evident falsehood broke from the lips of the judges themselves; but they suffered it to pass unnoticed; and at length one of them turned towards the young cavalier, asking, as had been the case with all previous witnesses, if he had any questions to put.

"I could have wished," replied Bernard de Rohan, "to have asked this man what length of time I was absent when I followed my poor friend into the forest, leaving him upon the road. It is vain, however, to do so; for, whatever he were to say, no one would believe it. His testimony, at least in my favour, is worthless."

"Pray to what would the question tend?" demanded

the judge who had before spoken. "Perhaps we may put it in such a way as to prevent his prevaricating."

"It would tend, sir," replied Bernard de Rohan, "to show that I had not been absent a sufficient length of time to murder my friend, to drag his body to the spot described, and to bury it by any means that I could then command."

"I will attend to the suggestion afterward," said the judge, "and give you the benefit of it. This, sir, is only the first examination; we cannot close the business till we have received authentic copies of the information taken at Bourg."

The examination of Pierre Millort was then continued for some time longer; but all that he heard, and all that he saw, seemed only to terrify and distract him the more, and at length the presiding judge announced, in a clear, distinct tone, that all persons but the prisoner and the last witness were to leave the court. As he spoke, he fixed his eyes sternly upon Pierre Millort, but neither the unhappy man nor his master comprehended fully the meaning of those orders.

The ushers retired from the doors; all the clerks but one withdrew; the Lord of Masseran, also, who had remained hitherto as the accuser, slowly left the hall, and the doors closed behind them all, leaving Bernard de Rohan still upon the scellette, with Pierre Millort standing before the judges. One or two of the magistrates themselves looked down with pale countenances upon the papers before them, and a sensation of awe took possession of Bernard de Rohan, from a vague but indistinct notion of what was about to take place.

At length, when the doors were shut, the president rang a small silver bell which stood beside him, and another pair of doors, which hitherto had not been opened, were thrown back. Bernard de Rohan, as he sat, could not see into that chamber; but Pierre Millort, who stood in the witness's place, did see, and was instantly seized with an aguish shaking from head to foot.

"Monsieur de Rohan," said the president, "it is the will of the king, of which we, your judges, fully approve, that as you have not in the least prevaricated, but have maintained, unwavering, the same story, and have neither refused to plead nor challenged your judges, you should not be subject to the question extraordinary. This man, however, Pierre Millort, having shown him-

self a notorious prevaricator, and unworthy of belief under ordinary circumstances, must be taught, by the force of corporeal pain, to speak the truth."

"I do beseech you, sir," said Bernard de Rohan, "if it be possible, spare the unhappy man. You must all perceive clearly that a weak notion of serving me, by concealing suspicious circumstances, first misled him, and that, since he has been in this place, terror and folly have quite bewildered him. Spare him, then, sir, spare him, if it be possible, and let the whole weight of his testimony go against myself."

"It is impossible, sir," replied the judge. "We must not reject the means assigned to us for the purpose of arriving at substantial justice. Take him away!" he continued, addressing two men who had entered from the chamber of the torture, and who instantly seized upon the unhappy servant, and drew him towards the open doors, notwithstanding prayers, and tears, and struggles. "I was going to say," continued the president, speaking to the prisoner, "that, if you so please, as you may be inculpated by his confession, you may enter the chamber of the question, and hear the words he uses."

Bernard de Rohan shook his head. "No, sir," he said, "no! It is enough—it is too much to know that such horrid dealings are taking place with a fellow-creature. I will not witness them;" and, leaning his arm upon his knee, he buried his eyes in his hand.

Almost as he did so, a small, dark-looking man entered the hall, and spoke a few words to the president in a low voice. The judge replied emphatically, "Fortes et dures!"

Another few low-spoken words were addressed to him by the messenger from the chamber of the torture, and his reply was, "Jusqu'à la mort—Even unto death! should it be necessary; but you have the surgeon there!"

The man nodded his head and retired. Then came an interval not exactly of silence, but of low sobs and of stifled entreaties, and of sounds of wailing as of a person in deep grief and fear. The young gentleman sat listening in horror and indignation of heart, till at length, in about five minutes more, there issued forth a shrill and piercing cry of anguish from the chamber of the torture, that made the whole hall ring, and even blanched the lips of the judges that sat at the table.

Then came another, another, and another cry; and a loud voice at length was heard to say, "You are carrying it too far; relax the wheel a little."

"I will confess, I will confess," cried the voice of the unhappy Pierre within. "I will confess all; I do believe he murdered him—I know he did—I was sure of it at the time. It was that made me speak falsely. He was my master, my born master. Oh God! oh God! Set me free! set me free!"

"But were you the accomplice of his crime?" cried another voice from within. "Did you know he was going to do the deed?"

"Oh no, no!" exclaimed the unhappy man. "I knew nothing, I knew nothing. It was all—" another fearful shriek interrupted what he was saying, as the rack seemed to have been more extended by the executioner, and then suddenly came a dead silence.

"Set him free, set him free," cried several voices. "He is gone."

"He has only fainted," said the voice that had asked the questions.

"He is dead," said another voice, probably that of the surgeon. "I told you you were turning the wheel too far."

CHAPTER XI.

The old gardens of the Louvre have long given place to other things; and the booth of a man who sells paroquets now occupies the spot where some of the first foreign flowers and rare shrubs were planted in France. Those gardens, however, still existed in their beauty at the time we speak of; and on a fine autumn evening, some few days after the events recorded in the last chapter, Henry the Second walked there alone, unaccompanied even by a page.

It was now late in September, and the hour was about six o'clock in the afternoon. The air was fresh and delicious, the tempered sunshine was streaming upon the walks from a point low in the sky, and the air and the scene altogether were such as a monarch might well

choose for a brief period of solitary thought and tranquil contemplation, after the fatigues either of kingly care, anxiety, and business, or of courtly pomp, amusement, and gayety; for, after all, everything in this world, whether of pleasure or of business, ends in fatigue, unless it be commune with our own hearts and with God in his bright works.

In such a scene, too, and at such a moment, the heart of a monarch might well become softened. Its natural feelings were not diverted there by the pressure of many momentous things, by the urgency of relentless policy, the considerations of harsh expediency, by anger, irritation, or vexation; neither was it rendered callous or careless by the varieties, and pleasures, and frivolities of courtly society: in the quiet sunshine and silent solitude, the voice of tenderness and human charity could be heard, no longer drowned in the insect buzz of everlasting trifles.

It was wise, then, of those who chose such a moment to appeal to the heart of the monarch for an act of mercy, and such was the purpose with which, at the end of about half an hour, the dauphin Francis, his sister Claude, and good Father Willand, the priest, approached the king, and interrupted his solitary walk.

Henry received his two children kindly, and, taking the princess's hand in his own, continued to pursue his walk, only marking the presence of Father Willand by a slight shade, not exactly of displeasure, but of sadness.

"Well, Claude," he said, "I am about to part with you soon, fair one, to give you as a bride to this valorous prince, who may well say that he has won you by his sword. You will be sorry to leave me. Is it not so?"

"Most truly, my dear father," she replied; "but let us not now talk of such sorrowful things, for I come to speak with you upon another, which at present is little less so, but which you may render happier if you will."

"Nay, nay, no petitions, Claude," said the king. "I thought I knew your errand when I saw that good man; but I must have no petitions."

"But indeed, dear father, we are all petitioners," said the dauphin, "and all in the same cause. We come to beseech you to remit the sentence of this unhappy young gentleman."

"Is the sentence pronounced?" demanded the king.

"It is, sire," answered the dauphin; "and it is death."

"Then he must die!" replied the king, solemnly: "for I will not interpose."

"I beseech you, my father, consider," said the princess. "Even if you pardon him, he must still undergo a terrible punishment, for she whom he loves can never give her hand to a man condemned for killing her brother."

"And besides, sire," added the dauphin, "think how hard it is that he should be the first to suffer for one of these unhappy rencounters, when, in all probability, he was provoked thereunto by insults that were not to be borne."

"Has he confessed the deed?" demanded the king. "If he have done so, that may make a great difference; for at present he stands condemned, through his own obstinacy in not acknowledging the act, not for death inflicted either in duel, with proper witnesses, or in hot and accidental strife, but for deliberate murder, with all the aggravations of concealment and denial. The burying of the body, the leaving it there in unconsecrated ground, the appearing at the court with a bold and innocent face, all these are bitter aggravations. But, I ask again, has he confessed the deed? Did he show any sign of such intention when the sentence was announced to him?"

"Alas! no, sire," replied the prince: "he has in no shape confessed; but the sentence has not yet been read to him, as it wants your majesty's confirmation."

"Then let it be at once confirmed," said the king. "My determination is taken, my mind made up, Francis."

"I beg your gracious pardon, sire," said Father Willand, interposing; "but, before you pronounce finally, hear me too. Your royal son has spoken as becomes a prince, your daughter has sued as a woman, and I come to talk as a priest."

"I believe, under such circumstances, my good father," said Henry, with a faint smile, "you ought, according to rule, to send me your admonitions through one of my chaplains."

"What, trust a purse with a pickpocket!" exclaimed the priest, his usual jesting bitterness mingling strangely with the tone of deep feeling in which he spoke. "No, no, sire, the admonitions would slip through their

fingers by the way. Whenever your majesty wants to do a real act of charity, do it yourself; don't trust to an almoner. I, in my priestly capacity, do as I would have you do in your kingly one, and therefore I beseech you to hear my admonitions from my own mouth; I would not have them tainted by the breath of any other man."

"Well, well, speak then," replied the king; "it shall never be said that I refused to hear. What have you to say in this youth's favour, why the law of the land should not take its course?"

"In his favour I have very little to say," replied the priest; "for, indeed, there is very little to be said in the favour of any living man. We are all pups of one litter, blind and stupid when we are young, and snarling and vicious when we are old; but what I have to say is a warning to your majesty. What will you think of yourself and your present obstinacy should this young man not be guilty? If, entertaining doubts of his being the real person who did the deed, as I know you do, you resist all prayers and entreaties in his favour, and send him to the scaffold, what will be your feelings should you afterward find out that he was not the man? How will you reproach yourself then?"

"The impartial judges of the land," replied Henry, somewhat sternly, "have pronounced him guilty. If there be a fault, the fault is theirs, not mine."

"Think you, sire," said the priest, "that in purgatory those judges will make you a low bow, and beg to have your share of fire as well as their own? With whom, sire," he continued, in a still bolder voice, "with whom rests the power to save or to destroy? and why is that power trusted by God unto a king? Inasmuch, and solely inasmuch, as it is needful to have one to moderate the rigour of the law. The law must entertain no doubt. It either acquits or it condemns; but still reason may have a doubt, and it is for that that kings are invested with the glorious privilege of mercy. I tell you, sire, that, more than at any other time, you prove the divine origin of your power when you exercise it to save; for, in communicating to you the means of showing mercy, God himself gave you a share of his brightest attribute. If, I say, if you have no doubt of his guilt, send him to the scaffold; for your firm conviction, as an upright judge, shall justify you in the eye of Heaven. But if, after having first heard the cause

yourself, and read every word that has been given, you do entertain a doubt, exercise the right of showing mercy, or prepare for long and bitter self-reproach in this world, and for the punishment of blood-guiltiness in the next."

"Your words are very bold, priest," replied the king, sharply, "and this scene must never be repeated. But, as we have entered on the subject, I will demand what motive, what reason I have to suppose that this young man is not guilty? Was it because my own eye did not see him strike the blow? Was it because others did not see him? If so, who would ever be convicted? for the more cool and deliberate the murderer is, the more care does he take to conceal the deed, the more skilfully does he contrive to veil himself. The practised assassin—the prudent, thoughtful, careful villain—would escape, and none but less practised murderers would fall, if we always required ocular proof of guilt. Why then, I say, why then should I in the slightest degree doubt that the sentence which has been passed is just? What should I judge from but the strong evidence of guilt which has been given?"

"From his whole life, sire," replied the priest. "There is, as you admit, a gap in the evidence against him; an interval to be filled up by the imagination, with materials chosen from probabilities. Why choose the evil probabilities and reject the good? Why judge from a few hasty words that passed before, and refuse credit to the witness of a noble life?"

"My good father," replied the king, "I wish that, in common justice, I could found any belief in the young man's innocence upon that which you would adduce in his behalf. True, in Italy he has served well and nobly. True, his character for generosity, courage, truth, and humanity has stood high; and, to show you how willing I have been to give him every advantage of that character, I will tell you that, foreseeing the painful decision to which I must come, I sent private messengers of my own to inquire into all his proceedings, and, alas! the accumulation of charges against him from various sources throws down a weight in the scale of his guilt which overbalances far his previous good reputation. In the mountains I find him consorting with brigands and the wild, daring freebooters, whom long years of war and calamity have caused to rise up in Savoy. I

find him contracting a clandestine marriage contrary to what he knew was right. I find him in the town of Lyons openly deprecating the execution of the laws upon the convicted heretic Jamets. So much so, indeed, that an order for his arrest and imprisonment had been given the next day by the proper officers of the town, before it was known he had quitted the city. Then came this dark transaction; then his drawing his sword upon the Count de Meyrand within the precincts of the palace, and contrary to my express and repeated prohibition."

"But, sire," said the dauphin, "I assured your majesty before—"

"You told me, Francis," said the king, "that this unhappy gentleman was out with you on some foolish expedition when the affair with Meyrand took place; but you told me, also, that you did not know which had first drawn; that, not expecting such an event, you had not remarked the facts. These are but separate things, it is true; but the whole acts as a counterpoise to any doubts in his favour which his previous character might have inspired; and I feel that, in justice to my subjects, and in the exercise of that authority for which I am responsible to God, I am bound not to interfere with the course of the law, nor even to move a finger to save him from the death awarded to him. I have done enough already in sparing him the question, and I will do no more. His only hope of any mitigation lies in a full confession and explanation of every circumstance. Let the sentence be read to him, and he shall then have eight-and-forty hours to make his statement or to prepare for death."

Father Willand turned away without another word, seeing that the king was inexorable; but the dauphin paused, saying, "I trust, at all events, sire, that you will commute the punishment to the axe;" and, seeing the king shake his head, he added, "Consider, sire, the degradation and disgrace to the whole noble family of Rohan."

"The disgrace is in the act, not in the punishment," replied the king; "I will not change the law. Claude," he continued, turning to his daughter, "this makes you sad. You should not mingle with such things. They are not fit for women. Men's hearts, hard as they are, have enough to do to bear them."

"It was the misery of that poor girl Isabel, sire," replied the princess, "that made me come to your majesty. She wished to see you herself, but I said I would plead for her."

"Let her not come, Claude—let her not stir from Nogent," said the king. "It will but be painful to her and to me, for I must refuse her. In this business, nothing will move me. So inform her, and do your best to sooth and comfort her."

"There are wounds that have no balm, sire," replied the princess, "and I fear hers is one of them."

Thus saying, she too turned away, and, with the dauphin, bent her steps back towards the palace. Ere they had gone far, however, they heard the voice of the king raised and pronouncing the name of "Father Willand," who by this time was at some distance. The dauphin called to him, and sent him back to the monarch, saying, as the good priest passed, "Speak more gently, father, to him, but press it still. He may yet relent."

Father Willand bent his head, and walked on without reply to the spot where Henry stood.

It might be that he expected some fresh rebuke for the boldness of his words, but the king spoke in a mild tone, saying, "Now listen to me, my good father: I am about to say to you what I would not say before those young people. If I did not know you to be an honest man, I might be taught to judge very harshly of you, for you have many enemies, and yourself at the head of them. However, to return to what we were speaking of but now: you imagine that I have a doubt in my mind as to this unhappy man's guilt. I must now tell you that I have none, and your words have produced no difference. It is my firm and unalterable conviction that his hand slew Henry of Brienne. The question as to whether it was or was not in casual strife between two angry men, he has himself refused to answer, and, therefore, the consequences be upon his own head. I will give him one more chance, however. Go to him yourself from me. Tell him that you have authority to offer him pardon in case of his confessing the offence, and that he can truly and sincerely aver that it was an accidental quarrel which produced such results. Let him in any way show this to be the case, and he shall be pardoned. Moreover, let him not think that by such a con-

fession alone he loses the hand of Isabel of Brienne, for let him be assured the sentence shall be executed against him if he does not confess; and he must remember that, even had not this unhappy business occurred, I had sworn by my honour her hand should never be his, on account of the business between him and Meyrand. Let him, then, under these circumstances, losing nothing and gaining all by confession, without any other hope of life but that, acknowledge freely and fairly the deed that he has done, and give me some excuse at least for mercy."

"I go, sire," replied the priest, "to fulfil your majesty's commands; but forgive me if I say that I know it will be in vain. My conviction is that he is altogether innocent; and, if so, I know him too well to suppose that he will acknowledge guilt."

"Go," said the king, "go, at all events. It is his only hope of life; and, if he still refuses, let me hear no more petitions. The act, as I said before, be upon his own head!"

Thus saying, the king turned away, but the priest followed him, saying, "Your majesty has forgotten one important point. To a prisoner of such consequence, not even my character will obtain admission for me. They will let me in willingly enough to common felons, robbers, and murderers, but were I to go and ask entrance to see a noble of the first class, charged with and condemned for such a crime, the jailers would drive me away with derision."

"You shall have an order, you shall have an order," said the king. "Come with me to the palace;" and, walking on with a quick step, he drew the order himself in one of the lower halls of the Louvre, and placed it in the hands of Father Willand.

In those days a refinement of precaution did not require that the orders of even an absolute monarch should be always countersigned by his secretary of state; and Father Willand, not trusting the paper he possessed to any one, hastened onward towards the prison of the Châtelet. By this time the sun had gone down, and the gay people of the capital were all hurrying hither and thither towards their homes. At the corner of one of the streets, however, which led up from the Seine, the priest's robes brushed against a tall, powerful man, dressed well, and even splendidly, as far as the dark

nature of his habiliments would permit. Father Willand, in his eagerness, noted him not, but the stranger turned round and stopped him, by laying his hand upon his shoulder.

"Ha, chevalier!" said the priest, "is it you? Why, when came you hither? Have you heard all these bad tidings?"

"I know them as you your breviary," said Corse de Leon; "I have watched the whole events. But whither go you now? I want to speak with you."

"I am bound upon an errand from the king to the prisoner," replied the priest. "I am to tell him that his last and only hope for mercy is in confession."

"Confession!" cried Corse de Leon, with a scoff; "think you that he will confess? But go on your way, good father, and meet me an hour hence under the arcade of the Cordeliers, before you return to the king. I have much to say to you, very much; for something remains to be done, and there is but little time to do it."

Thus saying, he walked on, and the priest pursued his

CHAPTER XII.

"I AM sorry for you, young gentleman," said the deep, hoarse voice of Bertrand Saar, as he stood at the door of the dungeon to which Bernard de Rohan had been consigned after his sentence was determined, though that sentence had not yet been announced to him. "I am sorry for you; for good Father Willand, who sometimes comes here to see the poor folks, told me much about you. What can I do to help you? Will you have wine?"

"I thank you for your kindness, my good friend," replied Bernard de Rohan, calmly, "but I will take no wine. If you could give me ink and paper, indeed, to write, that I should greatly prize; and as I have nothing to say that the whole world may not see, you can do no wrong in letting me have them."

"There is no order against it," replied the man, "though it is the first time I was ever asked for such a

thing here. But you shall have it;" and, thus saying, he withdrew.

Some minutes elapsed before the key turned in the lock again, and the prisoner, who sat meditating, with his arm leaning on the small table by the lamp, looked up, expecting to see the jailer once more. It was not so, however; for the first thing he saw was a priest's vestments, and then, shading his eyes from the light, he recognised Father Willand. Oh, who can tell the joy and the delight that the sight of a familiar face will sometimes produce in moments of solitary pain and dark despondency? Bernard de Rohan started up, and grasped the good man's hand, reiterating again and again how happy he was to see him.

"My son," said the priest, "I come to bring you a message which offers you life, but upon one condition."

"Then, of course, I am condemned," said Bernard de Rohan. "I have not yet heard my sentence; but I guessed its nature, from the change which they have made in the place of my confinement. Till this morning they kept me in the Tower; but, after appearing before the judges again to-day, and hearing the papers read from Bourg and other places, I was brought down hither—as if to prepare me for death," he added, with a smile, "by placing me living in the grave."

"I fear your sentence is pronounced," said the priest, "and that it is death; but yet, Bernard, but yet, my poor young friend, there is one means by which you can escape your fate. The king, as I have said, upon one condition promises you pardon; but it is a condition which I know not whether you will accede to. Yet, before you reject it, Bernard, think of poor Isabel, and recollect that the only comfort, the only happiness she can now have in life, is to know that you live, even if you live not for her."

"But what is the condition?" demanded Bernard de Rohan. "There is scarcely aught on earth that I would refuse to do which could give her comfort or relief for a moment, were it to work as a slave at the galleys, to dig in the dark mine, or to live far from my own land, without hope or comfort—I would not hesitate even for a moment, could it but give her peace."

"The condition is," said the priest, "that you confess the act of which you are accused. Such is the king's final message and determination. Life, if you confess! Death, if you deny!"

"What!" exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, "confess a falsehood? Confess what I have never committed? No, no," he continued, starting up indignantly, and casting his hands abroad. "No, no! Truth is the only possession I have left. Their sentence may take from me rank, and territories, and reputation, and life itself; but my truth they cannot touch. That is above their might. That is God's own and mine; and nothing they can do can wring from me that bright and best possession, which has gone with me from the cradle until now, shall outlive this body, and triumph over the grave itself. Let them, if they will, stretch me upon the rack, or break me upon the wheel, they shall hear no cry, no groan. The tortured limb may writhe, the weak fibre may quiver, but my truth is beyond the iron or the cord, and that they cannot shake. Speak not to me of it, father; speak not of it. Thank the king for his grace and kindness. Tell him that I forgive him, and all my judges, for there was much matter to deceive them; but add, that he is mistaken in supposing that Bernard de Rohan would tell a lie, even to save himself from the most painful death. Tell him I hold the privilege of truth far higher than that of living! And now, father," he continued, "let us turn our thoughts to other things. Death is to be my portion. Let me prepare for it, both as regards this world and as regards another."

"Not now," replied the priest, "not now. I will return to you, I promise. At present I must go back to the king. But fear not, I will return."

"I would fain say what I have to say even now, good father," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Since I have returned to this fair realm of France, I have seen so many a just expectation trodden under foot by fate, so many a fair hope blasted, that you cannot wonder I should no longer calculate upon the event of even the next minute. You may not be able to return; and what I have to say of this world's things, at least, will take but short space. When I am dead, bear my last words to Isabel: tell her I loved her to the last with that love which mingles easily with the thoughts of heaven; tell her that, though I know she must grieve, yet I beseech her to grieve calmly; and though from her heart I am sure she will mourn me, yet not to mourn, if possible, with persevering sadness. Let her seek all consolation that may be. She will not love any as well as she has loved me;

and my affection must not be a selfish one. Above all things, tell her that I died innocent; and beseech her to take all means, to use every effort, to discover the murderer of her brother; for that murderer will one day be convicted, and my name cleared. I have my suspicions; but they are but suspicions, and I will not, must not give them utterance. Suffice it that I am innocent; and, to witness that I am so, I adjure that all-seeing Judge, into whose bright presence I shall soon be called. Tell her likewise—But whom have we here?"

The door of the dungeon had been opened while the young cavalier was speaking, and two men in black robes appeared, following the jailer.

"I suppose you come to tell me, sirs," continued Bernard de Rohan, "that my firm maintenance of the truth must conduct me to the torture. So be it, if it must be: my tongue shall never betray my innocence. Lead on where you will; I am ready to follow."

"You mistake, sir," said one of the men. "We come to summon you to the hall of the great Châtelet, to hear your sentence read: that is all. It is the king's will that you should hear it this night. You must prepare your mind for the worst, however."

"I know all that can befall me," replied the prisoner, "and am ready to endure it. The sentence, of course, is death. It is unmerited; and yet I do not arraign it. Perchance, had I been a judge, appearances might have made me decide as wrongly. Lead on! Good father, see me again before I die."

Thus saying, Bernard de Rohan grasped Father Willand's hand, and, with one of the ushers on either side, walked forth into the corridor, where a small body of archers, with their partisans in their hands, waited to guard him through the streets.

It was now dark, but the torches carried before the unhappy cavalier gathered together a number of boys and idlers to run along by the side of the soldiers, and gaze at the face of the prisoner. Other parties, too, passing along on foot, crossed the path of the archers more than once, with flambeaux flashing against the walls, as some gay lord of the court proceeded to this or that merry scene; and more than once Bernard de Rohan caught sight of some well-remembered face, which recognised him not even by a look.

At length, however, the gates of the great Châtelet

were reached, and in a few minutes the prisoner was in the hall where his judges were seated. When he entered, he heard the deep tones of the president pronouncing sentence on a common felon, whose piteous lamentations from time to time interrupted the awful words which sentenced him to be broken limb by limb upon the wheel. When they were spoken, he was dragged away in the midst of vain petitions; and another was brought up, who heard the same decree in dogged silence, without word, or cry, or tear, or look of terror, and strode calmly away to meet the fate he had probably calculated on long before.

At length the name of Bernard de Rohan was pronounced, and the president addressed to him nearly the same terrible words.

Though he had expected death, there were parts of the sentence which seemed to surprise and trouble him. "What!" he exclaimed, "have I heard you right, sir? To be degraded of my rank—to lose my knighthood—to fall by an infamous punishment, which extends its dark spot to all my kindred?"

"Even so, Monsieur de Rohan," said the president, in a sorrowful voice; "it can be no otherwise. Judged guilty of a crime to which the law awards such punishments, we have nothing to do but to pronounce that sentence."

Bernard de Rohan gazed down upon the pavement for a moment or two in silence, deep, bitter, despairing. His hands had fallen clasped before him, and remained motionless. His fine head drooped upon his bosom; and the light of the lamps above pouring upon him, displayed, perhaps, as stern and terrible a picture of mental anguish triumphing for a moment over firm determination as ever was beheld by the eye of man; that eye which, in the awful struggle that has gone on for ages between good and evil, has looked upon a mass of agony, sorrow, and despair, which, could it all be beheld at once, or conceived only faintly, would break man's heart for the wickedness and cruelty of his own nature. The next moment, however, he raised his head again: it seemed as if for him the bitterness of death was passed, and his spirit had recovered all its firmness.

"It is over!" he said, speaking to himself; "it is over!" and, turning to the judges, he added, "Your sentence is pronounced, and I must bear it. The last hope

has passed away from my heart: the hope of dying, not as becomes my innocence, at least as becomes my rank, and as becomes one who has fought, not ingloriously, for his country. This expectation, like all others, has passed away, and I am ready to endure all that you, in your erring judgment, can inflict. My innocence you cannot take from me; nor, strong in that innocence, can you disgrace me; for no one can disgrace me but myself, and that I will never do. Others, however, you may injure. Those who, as innocent as myself, have no stain upon their name, will feel that which you inflict upon me as a stain that can never be effaced. I grieve for them, not for myself. One half hour's agony can easily be endured, when at the end comes peace, tranquillity, and reward for all suffering. To the living, however, you are responsible for the deeds that you do to me; and the time will come when, the truth being discovered, those whom you now wrong so bitterly will call for the reversal of your sentence, will restore my name to honour, and may, perhaps, call for retribution upon those who, too rashly and too hastily, pronounced an innocent man guilty where there was reasonable doubt, and awarded the extreme of punishment when there was no absolute proof of criminality. I say it not to threaten you: may God forgive you! May man forgive you also; and from my very heart I say, I forgive you too!"

Thus speaking, Bernard de Rohan turned to leave the judgment-hall.

The ushers were by his side in a moment, and the guards again surrounded him at the door. As they issued forth from the Châtelet, however, and once more entered the streets, they came upon a number of advocates and people of the robe, who were crowding into the building to hear the judgments pronounced. A slight movement took place at that instant among the persons who were conveying the prisoner back to his dungeon, and he thought he heard a voice whisper, "Take courage!" At the same time, one of the advocates, catching a sight of his face, said aloud, "It is Monsieur de Rohan." A number of people who were standing round the door heard the words, and many of them ran along by the side of the line of soldiers, as they proceeded towards the prison, eagerly striving to catch a view of the captive as he was hurried forward in the midst.

As the torchlight fell upon the crowd of faces gazing through upon him between the archers, Bernard de Rohan thought that he saw looks of sympathy and sorrow rather than scorn and reprobation, and a momentary thought of attempting to escape crossed his mind. As yet he was not fettered. He knew that, on his return to the prison as a condemned criminal, such would be the case. The thought of the abhorred iron strengthened the wish and the purpose of flight; and, at the same moment, a shout which he heard among the people, and a curse or two at the archers who guarded him, seemed to show that, at the time such ideas were passing through his mind, a desire to help and deliver him had taken possession of the crowd.

Before he could make even the slightest attempt to effect his escape, however, the very shout which expressed the people's sympathy brought up a fresh body of armed men, who drove back the populace, and filled every gap in the line of soldiers around him. The people recoiled; but, undaunted by the threats of the armed men, they followed towards the little Châtelet in increasing numbers. There was no one to lead them, however; and, before they could find any person to assume such an office, the party of police had reached the gloomy building where they were to deliver their prisoner once more into the hands of his jailers.

At the first signal the doors were thrown open. The troop marched in, the massive gates closed behind them, and—after pausing for a minute or two, to talk over what had occurred, to vow that the young lord was as innocent as day, and to regret not having done a thousand things to effect his liberation—the persons composing the crowd began to drop away. Many of the more resolute remained to see the soldiers come forth again; and there was a considerable crowd round the gates of the Châtelet when the archers and ushers once more appeared, which was scarcely five minutes after their entrance. The archers, who were in high disrepute at that time, did not escape without some hooting; and stones were also thrown. The people were dispersed, however, in a minute; and the soldiers separating, pursued the fugitives in various directions, while the ushers betook themselves each to his path, according as business or inclination directed him.

CHAPTER XIII.

With a heavy heart good Father Willand left Bernard de Rohan, when, as we have shown, the prisoner went to hear his sentence read at the hall of the great Châtelet. It was not, however, towards the palace of the Louvre, as he had led Bernard de Rohan to imagine, that Father Willand turned his steps. Thither, indeed, he intended ultimately to go; but he had thought it no crime so far to deceive his young friend as to conceal from him, under the excuse of seeing the king, that he was about to return in haste to Corse de Leon, in the hope of devising some means—however vague might be his notion thereof—for delivering the prisoner from the hands of those who held him in bondage. Some foundation had been afforded to such a hope by the words which Corse de Leon had spoken. He had said that something remained to be done, though there was but little time to do it; and, however wild and rash might be the supposition, Father Willand's confidence in the brigand's extraordinary resources led him to believe that Bernard's deliverance might really be effected.

He took his way, then, in haste towards a convent of Cordeliers, which at that time occupied nearly two thirds of a street leading from the Place de Grève towards the Rue St. Antoine. A large arcade surrounded two sides of the building, which formed the angle of that street and another, and under it had been the appointed place of meeting. There was a lamp over one of the chief doors of the convent, but it gave but a faint and inconsiderable light; and Father Willand, after pursuing his way from one end of the arcade to the other, fancied that he must have missed seeing the person whom he sought in the darkness which reigned under the arches. He retrod his steps, however, examining well every pillar and every corner, but Corse de Leon was not there; and, supposing that he had himself come before the time, the good priest continued to walk up and down under the arcade for a full hour. He then became uneasy, especially as he knew that his

return would be expected by the king; and, after pausing for a short time longer, and looking round again and again in vain, he took his way towards the palace, where he was instantly admitted to Henry's cabinet.

"What news? what news, priest?" demanded Henry, eagerly, turning from a conversation which he was holding with Monsieur de Vieilleville and another gentleman. "Has he confessed the crime?"

"No, sire," replied Father Willand, "he has not confessed it, and never will, for he is innocent."

The king frowned upon him, but replied nothing. Turning, however, to Monsieur de Vieilleville, he said, "On that one point you have conquered, De Vieilleville. We must not disgust and alienate so many of our high nobility. On all other points I am firm, but I yield that; and no more can be demanded of me. Go back to the prisoner, father," he said, addressing Father Willand, "and tell him that, not out of compassion for himself, but out of consideration for the many noble families to which he is allied, and of all the branches of the princely house of Rohan, I have determined to grant him the privilege of the axe, that he may not die the death of a common felon. But let him know that his execution is ordered to take place in the court of the Châtelet at daybreak to-morrow morning, and exhort him to use his short space diligently to make his peace with God, which can only be done by a confession of his crimes."

The priest made no reply, for he saw that the king's mood was unusually stern; but, hastening back to the prison, he demanded once more to see the prisoner. The lieutenant happened to be standing near the gate at the moment, receiving the keys for the night, for it was now near eleven o'clock; and Bertrand Saar, in the presence of his superior officer, assumed a sullen harshness to Father Willand, telling him that he had come too late, and could not have admission.

At the sight of the king's order, however, the lieutenant commanded the jailer of the lower prison to lead the way instantly to the dungeon, and followed himself with the priest, inquiring, with sly and insinuating questions, what was the king's ultimate determination regarding the prisoner. Father Willand replied as briefly as might be, for his mind was full of his sad task; and, with heavy brow and cast-down eyes, he walked

on, venting occasionally the bitter feelings of his heart in some sarcastic sally, murmured between his teeth, at laws, and kings, and society, and human nature.

At length, through the long, dark corridors, lighted but faintly on their way by the dim lantern of Bertrand Saar, they reached the door of Bernard de Rohan's dungeon, and the jailer paused sullenly, demanding the keys from the lieutenant of the governor, who still held them in his hand. The one which was first given proved not to be the right one; and, snatching somewhat roughly the whole bunch from the hand of his superior, the jailer applied another to the lock, which immediately opened the door.

The priest advanced to go in as Bertrand Saar drew the heavy door back; but, before he had taken a step into the dungeon, the exclamation of "Where is the prisoner?" caused the governor and the jailer both to start forward.

There stood upon the table the small, dim lamp; there appeared untouched the food which had been given as the refreshment for the night; there lay the book of prayers which had been the companion of Bernard de Rohan's hours during the past day; but he himself was not to be seen!

The lieutenant rushed to the side of the low bed, as if he thought the prisoner might be hidden among its scanty clothing, and then turned furiously upon the priest, exclaiming, "By the Holy Mother, this is your doing, and you shall suffer for it!"

"Man, you are mad," replied Father Willand. "Do you think that I would come here by the king's order to seek a man I had helped to escape?"

"You were with him this night before," cried the lieutenant. "You were with him long."

"And left him in the hands of the archers to conduct him to the hall of the great Châtelet," replied Father Willand. "When the wolf broke into the sheepfold, he was the first to call out Murder! and, by your wishing to lay it upon me, I suppose you have taken a bribe to set him free yourself."

The lieutenant then turned with the same fierceness upon Bertrand Saar; and, though the man was gazing upon him with a look of horror and astonishment at the event which had taken place—an event which was only known to have happened once before since the Châtelet

had been a prison—he proceeded to accuse the turnkey of having aided and abetted the prisoner's escape. Bertrand Saar, however, repelled the charge, and, with as much anger and indignation as the accuser himself had displayed, insinuated something very much to the same effect as the suspicion which Father Willand had expressed.

"He could prove," he said, "that he had never left his post in the small room near the gate: there were three other turnkeys with him the whole time. He had never given up his keys to any one for a moment, except when the archers brought back the prisoner, and then had sent his man to open the door of the dungeon. The keys were brought back to him instantly," he said, "as soon as the prisoner was shut in, and nobody else had ever the opportunity of opening that door, unless the lieutenant himself gave his own general key."

The lieutenant, on his part, raged and stormed; vowed that it might cost him his post, and even his life itself; caused the priest to be detained, Bertrand Saar to be deprived of his keys, and held in durance; examined and cross-examined the inferior turnkey who had locked Bernard de Rohan in for the night; but it was all in vain. The turnkey described how the prisoner had been taken to the great Châtelet for judgment; how he had been brought back again under a strong body of archers, and accompanied by several ushers and exempts; how the ushers had placed him in the dungeon, and even gone in with him to make all secure; and how he had locked the door upon him, and left it exactly in the same state in which it was found. He, too, proved that he had given up his keys to Bertrand Saar the moment that the thing was done, and had never returned to the dungeon afterward.

All still remained doubt and mystery; and the lieutenant, leaving the prison in a state of confusion such as had seldom been known within its walls, hastened as fast as possible to the great Châtelet, where he found some of the archers who had escorted the prisoner back to his dungeon still on duty. They confirmed in every part the story of the under-turnkey; and one of the ushers being called out of his bed, told exactly the same tale, and declared that the escape of the prisoner must have been connived at by some of the officers of the jail.

In the mean time there arrived from the palace an order for the execution of the prisoner at daybreak on the following morning; and it became necessary to rouse the proper officers of the city, and to make the king aware that his commands could not be obeyed. Every means were employed in the course of that night and the following day, both to discover how the fugitive had effected his exit from the prison, and to trace the course of his flight; but every effort was vain. Not the slightest vestige could be found to show how he had passed or whither he had gone; and the matter remained in as much obscurity and mystery as ever.

The king, from his own personal knowledge of Father Willand's proceedings, ordered him to be set at liberty immediately. At the same time, however, from a suspicion that he might have been instrumental in bribing the governor of the prison, he commanded him not to appear at court, but immediately to return to the cure which had been given him near the frontiers of Savoy.

"Tell his majesty," said Father Willand to the usher who brought him these commands, "that he has shown me the highest favour he could show; for I would rather, a great deal, live among the wolves and foxes upon four legs than among those upon two. I shall be safer there, too," he added, "among my flock, though I have not much of the mutton in my own nature; for here the beasts of prey eat one another; but there, wolf is safe from wolf, and fox from fox. Tell his majesty that I shall not be long in this great stone ant-hill; and when he wishes to make me a bishop, he will find me for the future within twenty leagues of Chambery."

It was not, however, towards the frontiers of Savoy that good Father Willand took his way in the first place. He did not, it is true, deviate so far as to be accused of disobeying the king's command; for, early on the morning of the following day, he mounted his mule, and, with his stock of clothing in a valise behind him, he ambled quietly on upon the road to Fontainebleau.

At Melun, however, he turned from the highway, and chose the smaller road leading towards Nogent, riding on till he came to a spot where, in the midst of a flat and somewhat uninteresting country, there lies a sweet little valley, filled with rich vegetation and varied by some romantic scenery of dell, and cliff, and rock, and

forest. A small stream wanders through it, winding along its bright but slow course towards the Seine; and at one of the bends of the river is a little church, with a village surrounding it consisting of many scattered cottages, each with its neat garden and its blushing patch of vines.

By the time that Father Willand reached this hamlet, his mule, which had accomplished a longer journey that day than probably it had ever made before, showed the strongest disposition in the world to stop; and in this point the good priest gratified him; for there was a shade of gray in the sky, slightly tinged with pink, which plainly intimated that the day was nearly at an end. Taking his path straight to the abode of the curé, Father Willand, as was then very customary, demanded, as a matter of course, shelter and entertainment for the night. It was granted with perfect readiness; and after resting there for some ten hours, and by his jests and gayety amusing and astonishing not a little his host, who was a plain, good man of very moderate intellect, the good priest mounted his mule again in the gray of the morning, and rode onward five or six miles farther in the valley.

The village and its inhabitants, their gardens and their vineyards, were by this time left far behind him; and instead there grew, on either side of the road, tall beech-trees and oaks, starting up with very little underwood, and stretching out thin and slender, as if to catch all those rays of the sun which were lost before they reached the bottom of the valley. A cottage or two appeared, it is true, from time to time; but they were only the scattered habitations of the woodman or the fisherman who tended the neighbouring forest, or who caught the fine trout in the stream that flowed beside the road, and sent them to the markets of Melun and Fontainebleau. Presently, however, appeared a massive gray wall, stretching along one side of the road, and thence sweeping up into the wood as if surrounding some extensive domain, or separating one portion of the forest from another. About half a mile farther were seen a pair of heavy iron gates, through the bars of which the eye could trace a long straight avenue, with a collection of towers and turrets gathered into the form of a house at the extreme end. Father Willand strove to obtain admission here, but in vain; and he then rode on to an-

other gate, where he was more successful, a stout porter, with a broad belt and sword, and a cock's feather in his hat, opening the gates for him, seeming to recognise him at once.

"Ah, good Father Willand, I am glad you are come," said the porter; "you will find our young lady sadly broken-hearted. She has done nothing but weep for this many a day. I hope you will be able to give her comfort."

"I shall, I shall," replied Father Willand; "I am a man of comfort. I bring her good news, my friend. Has any one been here before me?"

"None with any good news, father," replied the porter. "That Italian vagabond, the Lord of Masseran, was here two days ago, with a train big enough to have taken up the chateau and carried it away altogether; but I spoke to him through the grate, and told him the king's commands, that my young lady was not to be disturbed by any one. So then he sent up a boy with a message, demanding to speak with her, but she refused to see him, saying, 'that if her lady-mother were there, she would gladly see her, but would not see the Lord of Masseran.'"

"What said he then?" demanded the priest.

"He muttered between his teeth," answered the porter, "and talked something about convents that I did not well understand. But I would fain hear what the good news is, father; for I am sure, anything that is good for her, sweet lady, is good news for us all."

"Her ears shall hear it first, my son," replied the priest; "but it is something that will make her heart glad, and that is sufficient."

Thus saying, he rode on across the park, which was, in fact, a piece of forest ground, separated from the rest of the wood, in former days, by one of the lords of Brienne for the purposes of the chase. It was full of fallow and roe deer; and many a one bounded away into the underwood as the priest rode on, or stood gazing at him from a distance, in the dim silent shade of the trees, while he pursued his way over the open ground in the mellow autumn sunshine.

All was still and quiet, with the peculiar stillness of that season of the year, when the birds have lost their song, and the insect tribe have generally ended their short life, and everything seemed to partake of the calm

and silent melancholy which waits upon the passing away of the bright things of the summer. The chateau itself had the same tone. It stood cold and gray upon its own little platform, without flower or shrub, or any other thing, to break the line of its walls and towers, or to hide the spot where the stone-work rose from the earth. The very clear morning sunshine made it look the more sad; and a long shadow fell from it, like that which some deep and terrible bereavement casts over the rest of life. The great door in the midst was wide open, giving a view, through a stone-paved hall, into the court beyond. No eager domestics were seen moving about. No gay voices were heard speaking; though one saw from the opened windows, and the neat order of all around, that the place was fully tenanted; but all was clear, and cold, and calm, like a heart from which passion, and hope, and an interest in the world's things have passed away for ever.

Father Willand dismounted, and, fastening his mule to the ring at the side of the door, knocked loudly for admission. In a moment an attendant came out from a room where he had been sitting silent, and welcomed the good priest gladly.

"Where is your lady?" demanded Father Willand.

"She is walking alone, father," replied the man, "in the wood, up there upon the hill."

"See to my mule, my son," said the priest in reply: "I must go up and speak with your lady, for I bring her good tidings."

"Thank God for that," said the man; and, passing straight through the chateau and the court behind, Father Willand took his way towards a tall grove of trees which crowned the gentle rise to the eastward. Thither, however, we must precede him.

CHAPTER XIV.

In deep grief, and agony of mind not to be told, Isabel de Brienne had passed the time since the arrest of Bernard de Rohan. She had remained, indeed, at Fontainebleau only a few hours after he had been carried to

the Châtelet; for Henry, partly out of kindness, and in order to remove her from scenes where everything must be fertile of anguish to her heart, and partly to avoid solicitations and entreaties which he had predetermined not to grant, had commanded her to retire to the hunting-lodge of her family near Nogent, and not to quit it for the next month. He had taken every precaution, however, to guard her from intrusion and annoyance, and had strictly ordered that no one should be permitted to pass the gates of the park till her sanction had been obtained.

Everything else that he could do to contribute to her comfort he had done. Old servants had been assembled in haste from different parts of the country, and he had withheld, as far as possible, all the painful proceedings against Bernard de Rohan from her ears.

She had petitioned to be permitted to visit him in prison, but this had been sternly refused; and an intimation had also been given that no such request must be made again. She had petitioned also to see the king, but that prayer was rejected likewise. She had no resource, then, but to weep; and her whole time had been passed in wandering through the park, and in thinking with grief, or, rather, with despair, of past happiness and present sorrow. In nothing that she beheld did she find pleasure or relief. The face of nature, once so dear to her, was now all dark and cloudy; the sunshine and the storm were equally cheerless; the changing hour and varying season attracted no attention, diverted not her thoughts for a moment. Well might she have used the beautiful words of the poet:

"No more shall the spring my lost pleasures restore,
Uncheer'd I still wander alone;
And, sunk in dejection, for ever deplore
The sweets of the days that are gone.

"While the sun, as he rises, to others shines bright,
I think how he formerly shone;
Where others cull blossoms, I find but a blight,
And sigh for the days that are gone."

Most deeply did Isabel feel the truth of the comparison between light and happiness; how the colours of all that we look upon in life, as well as their brightness, depend upon the sunshine of our own hearts rather than upon their intrinsic qualities; how everything in

the night of sorrow and despair is dim, and gray, and comfortless. In none of all those things wherein she had formerly found enjoyment could she now even conceive that there was pleasure. She would suffer none to accompany her; the human voice had grown odious to her ear. As she walked, her eyes were for ever bent down upon the ground, that she might not see the fair things of nature, and the brightness which seemed so discordant to her heart.

She was thus wandering on, with those beautiful eyes still unexhausted of their tears, when the step of Father Willand caught her ear. She did not look up, however, for she thought that the person who approached was only one of her attendants, come to offer her words of unwelcome consolation or still more unwelcome remonstrance.

"Look up, lady! look up!" said the priest, in a quick, gay tone. "If you so water the ground with tears, we shall have such a crop of sorrows grow up as will break the hearts of all France. The nightingale sings at night, and the skylark in the morning. However rough and rugged may be the winter's day, spring comes at last; the sun looks out, and the world laughs."

"Alas! my good father," replied Isabel, recognising the voice, "I shall never laugh again;" but, as she raised her eyes with a slow and despairing look towards his face, there was something in his countenance —a meaning smile, an expression of satisfaction—that made her heart thrill and her whole frame tremble.

"He is pardoned! he is pardoned!" she exclaimed, darting forward to meet the priest. "Oh, father, tell me that he is pardoned!"

"Not exactly," answered Father Willand; "but, what is quite as good, he has made his escape, and, I trust, is somewhere over the frontier by this time."

Isabel sank on her knees where she stood; and, clasping her hands together, with her eyes raised towards heaven, she exclaimed, "Merciful God be praised!" and then, bending down her head without rising, she buried her eyes in her hands, and wept long and convulsively.

The priest tried to sooth and raise her, but she gently put away his hand, murmuring, "It is joy and thankfulness!"

After a time, however, she became calm; and rising, without speaking, she leaned upon the good man's arm,

and slowly took her way back to the chateau. They were both silent; but when she entered the dwelling where she had lately passed so many hours of misery, when she crossed the threshold of the room where she had sat, with nothing but despair at heart, in expectation of the last sad stroke of all, the contrast overpowered her, and again she wept profusely.

But her tears were now more calm; and, after a while, she gladly heard all that Father Willand had to tell, putting many a question, and making him repeat more than once the tale of his finding the dungeon empty of its tenant. Every particular, too, of Bernard de Rohan's last interview with the priest she asked eagerly, and listened to as if her life had depended on each word.

Between his answers she paused and pondered over what he said, and many times she inquired if Father Willand thought that Bernard had escaped beyond all reach of pursuit. He replied that there was every reason to suppose so, as it was certain that at the end of four-and-twenty hours not a trace had been discovered of the road which he had taken.

What course she was now to pursue herself became the next subject of discourse. "We must wait here," she said, "for some days longer, in order to make sure that he is not discovered and brought back; but then, good father, then I would fain leave this place, where I may be subject to painful importunity."

"But whither would you go, lady?" demanded the priest. "There are few of the neighbouring sovereigns that would dare to receive and protect a fugitive of your rank and wealth. Even the emperor and the King of Spain, though they would seem by their badge to claim kindred with the Argonauts, would think twice ere they received such a golden fleece from our fair land of France."

"I will put them to no such trial," replied Isabel. "Wherever I go, it shall be as one in humble station. I will cast from me all pretensions to that rank, the purple garments of which would be sad trammels on the limbs of a fugitive. Wealth I shall have none to display; and though the sums which the king has caused to be paid me, as heiress to my father and poor Henry, may afford me all that I can wish or need, I must husband it well even to do that. No, no, I will seek the cottage rather than the castle, good father. Pala-

have brought me wo enough; and in humble garb and lowly station I shall find shelter and disguise which will not easily be penetrated. In the mean time, we must wait here, good father, till we hear more from Paris."

"Faith, lady," replied the priest, "you may wait, if it so pleases you, but I must go on; for the king's anger at all this business is desperately aroused, and a ship which is sailing before that hurricane cannot well lay-to. His majesty has sent me full speed to my poor cure, and I must be onward on my way before nightfall."

Isabel looked down, grieved and perplexed; for she felt more than ever the need of some one on whose friendly aid and counsel she could rely, who would advise her in difficulties, aid her in danger, and support her under care and sorrow. While the fate of Bernard de Rohan had seemed decided; while she could look to no other prospect but the desolate solitude of a disappointed heart; while it wanted but the brief agony of the last fatal blow to sever her from worldly things for ever—absorbed in her anguish for him—she had thought little of her own future fate and situation. The idea of a convent, however, had been always present to her mind as her only place of refuge upon earth. She had laid out no plans upon the subject; she had given it no reflection; but it appeared as a thing decided, a something that was to be.

Now, however, the image of those gray walls and silent cloisters, which she had looked upon as the only shelter where she could consume the melancholy hours of after-life, had passed away. The hope of uniting her fate to that of him she loved revived, and she determined, as we have seen, to fly from those scenes where absolute power might at any time wring from her the hope which had so lately sprung up again. But the question of what was to be the next step—of the how, and the whither, and the when she was to fly, was pressed upon her imperatively by the good priest's last words.

If the wrath of the king, she thought, were so much excited, might it not speedily show itself towards her? Might he not foresee what she would do, and take measures to ensure that she should not execute the plan that seemed to her the only one which true and devoted affection could follow?

Thus it is with us all: impressed deeply with our own purposes, wishes, and feelings, we believe that other people must have a glass within their bosom to reflect them all at once, not knowing that the sensations of every individual throughout the wide world are as variously modified as their features; that it is as difficult to find two hearts that feel, two minds that think exactly alike, as to find two faces that could not be distinguished from each other, or two bodies exactly similar; and that, in expecting or fearing that others should divine our impulses by their own, we calculate upon a thing which seldom if ever occurs. Our purposes may be discovered by a knowledge of our general habits of thought and action; but it rarely happens that the man is right who judges of another's motives by his own.

"The king," she thought, "will immediately see and understand that affection will induce me to dedicate my whole life to sooth and comfort him I love, in adversity and exile, and his anger will lead him to take instant means to prevent me from so acting."

Although it is true that the king's anger did produce, in some degree, the effect that she imagined, his conduct proceeded from none of the motives she supposed. He never dreamed that she would think of so bold and daring a thing as to fly from his court, and remove herself from his power. Such an action at that time might be considered as little less than high treason, and the likelihood thereof never entered into Henry's mind.

On such considerations, however, Isabel now acted; and, after a few minutes' thought, she said, "Well, good father, since it is so, I must fly from the king's wrath also, and I will fly at once, lest I be stopped altogether. By so acting, there will be no harm done. I will not believe that poor Bernard can be recaptured. God is too just and merciful to suffer one so innocent to perish. Even if he were, however, it matters not much whether I take the veil in this or in another land; and even by flying at once, perhaps I may mislead his pursuers into a belief that he has taken another course with me from that which he has really followed. I will fly with you at once, then, good father, and you shall be my guide and my supporter."

"I would fain it should be so, my child," replied Fa-

ther Willand; "but, in seeking to go with me, you are like a young fawn who should ask a hunted stag to take her under his protection when frightened by the cry of the hounds. They can trace me at every step, daughter, and doubtless have traced me on my way already. Thank God, there is more than one highway in France, and people that take two opposite roads may meet in the end. I have a plan for you, I have a plan for you. But we must be quick and active; and, whatever we do now, we will do with a good heart, since hope gives us her light to lead us on."

Father Willand remained with the lady till after the morning meal; but then his mule was brought round, and he took his departure with a blessing on the house. A servant went with him down the avenue to open the gates for him; but to him good Father Willand said little or nothing, though he had talked for some time apart with an elder attendant, who had first given him entrance. All then resumed its quiet in the chateau. Few of the inhabitants were seen moving about. The lady continued in her chamber with a young girl, who had become her immediate personal attendant since, on arriving at the court of France, she had formally dismissed for ever the woman Marguerite, who had so basely betrayed her. About five o'clock in the evening, however, at the great gates of the park appeared an officer of the king, with three or four attendants and a horse-litter: a long, awkward contrivance, borne between two horses, then much in use, although very liable to accidents. Having announced that he came from the king, he was of course admitted immediately, and rode through the park to the chateau.

"Inform your mistress," he said, to the servant whom he found in the hall, "that I have the king's commands to escort her immediately to Paris, and, at the same time, search this chateau and the adjacent grounds, in order to ascertain that a prisoner, just escaped from justice, is not here concealed."

The servant replied that he would instantly inform the lady; and, while he retired to do so, the officer ordered some of his followers to examine strictly every part of the park. They proceeded at once to obey his commands; but he himself was kept waiting in the hall for a considerable time. He heard doors open and voices calling, and one domestic asking another where their

mistress was. At length it was announced to him that she could not be found; and some declared that she must have gone out to walk again in the grove above, while others vowed that she had never quitted the house.

All soon became confusion, investigation, and doubt. The lady and two of her household were absent, and from the removal of jewels, money, and clothing, it was clear that no intention of speedy return was entertained. Every part of the chateau was searched, every part of the park, but nothing could be discovered. Every servant was examined, every peasant in the neighbourhood, but no information of any kind could be obtained; and it was universally asserted, that upon none of the three roads which led from the chateau had any one been seen but peasants, with the single exception of the priest, whose path could be traced back distinctly to Fontainebleau.

CHAPTER XV.

In a small dark room, situated at the end of a long passage up four flights of stairs, with the windows closed in order that the light from a lamp on the table might not find its way forth into the streets without, set four men, whose habiliments did not certainly agree very well with the scenes in which they were found. All were dressed well; two of them splendidly; and one, though more simple in his garments than the others, though small—perhaps even diminutive—in person, and remarkably beautiful in features, had with him an air of power, determination, and command, which marked him out as a man accustomed to the exercise of high authority, and conscious of possessing great influence of some kind.

Though such was the personal appearance of the party I have mentioned, the chamber in which they sat presented nothing but bare walls, clumsy settles of wood, an oaken table bearing a brass lamp, a brazen sconce against the wall, and a huge chimney of painted wood, jaundiced by the smoke of many a century.

Darkness had covered the earth many an hour, and

the whole party sat there for several minutes without uttering a word, the smaller person we have mentioned remaining apparently immovable at the head of the table, with his fine head resting upon a hand which was somewhat disproportioned to the size of his body, being large and muscular, and fixing his eyes with an expression of some eagerness and anxiety upon the door which led into the passage.

After this silence had continued for a considerable time, however, he raised his head, saying, "Snuff that candle in the sconce, Jarnac; I fear he has failed in his attempt."

"We should all be in a rare scrape," replied the other, who rose to do as he was told, "we should all be in a rare scrape if he should be caught and put to the torture."

"Did you ever kill a wolf, Jarnac?" demanded the one who had first spoken.

"Many a one, my lord," replied the other. "But what of that?"

"Why, if you have," replied his companion, "you have never heard him howl in his death. Now you would as soon make a wolf howl or a cat be silent when you are killing it, as you would make our good friend the chevalier say one word by all the tortures in the world. I know my man, and how entirely he can be trusted."

"I do wonder, I confess, maréchal," said one of the other gentlemen at the table, "that you make use of such people in any way. In this instance, indeed, his services may be very appropriate; but in the field the matter is different. What would the king say if he knew it?"

"He does know it," replied the other; "and he says what I will make you say some day, my good friend, when you see what these fellows can and will do in cases where their courage is put to the test. As to the man we have to deal with now, I can tell you, that with all the honourable service of such gentlemen as you are, with all your skill, and courage, and ability, I should not have been able to maintain Piedmont two months if it had not been for his assistance and for his intelligence."

"Why, what could Philip have done?" demanded the gentleman who had risen.

"He would have given me a *coup de Jarnac*,"* answered the one at the head of the table, which reply caused a smile to come upon the countenances of the rest. "But hark!" he continued, "I hear some one in the passage. Let us be upon our guard."

Scarcely had he uttered the last words, when a quick and eager hand was laid upon the lock, the door burst open, and a man clothed with the black robe and cap of an exempt rushed in suddenly. One of the gentlemen laid his hand upon his sword; but the intruder paused ere he reached the table, and looked round as one bewildered upon the faces there collected, while he who sat at the head of the table rose and embraced him warmly, exclaiming, "Welcome, my poor friend! welcome! Close the door, Jarnac, and lock it. Are you pursued, De Rohan? If you are, we have another place of security for you, behind the panel there. Are you pursued?"

"I believe not," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I think not. He who delivered me remains below to see; but I do not think, Brissac, that any one saw how the matter was accomplished. On my own life, it has all been so sudden that I myself scarcely know the facts; and to see you here, too, almost makes me fancy myself in a dream. How did it take place? Was the jailer bribed?"

"Nay," replied Brissac, "we know as little as you do: indeed, still less. All we can tell is, that our good friend the Chevalier Lenoir—finding I had arrived in Paris secretly, in order to disabuse the king's ear of the tales told him against Montmorency by the Guises, and to obtain farther assistance for myself in Savoy†

* This alluded to the famous duel, which had taken place some years before, in the presence of the whole French court, between Jarnac and La Chataigneraie, when the former, who was then quite an unknown young man, or only celebrated for his courteous manners and foppery, overcame his adversary, who was renowned for his fierce courage and skill in arms, by a back stroke, which divided the tendon of his leg. The latter ultimately died; and the superb supper which he had prepared in his tent to regale the lords of the court whom he had invited, with that ridiculous bravado, to revel with him after he should have killed Jarnac, was plundered in the most scandalous manner by the lackeys of the court. The expression of a *coup de Jarnac*, to express an unexpected blow, passed into a proverb from this event.

† This private expedition of Brissac to Paris, for the purposes here stated, would seem to be beyond doubt; and, illustrative of his

—came to seek me, and undertook to set you free from prison if I would undertake to get you safely out of Paris."

"And so you did not believe me guilty, Brissac?" exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, grasping his hand.

"How could I, my young friend?" replied Brissac. "How could any one who knows you as I know you? First, I do not think that any provocation would have tempted you to draw your sword on Henry of Brienne. Next, if you had done so in honourable strife, you never would have denied it; and as to doing any such thing other than honourably, no one who has served with you could dream of such a thing for a moment. But tell us how the chevalier managed to free you. We were in no degree made acquainted with his plans, and are as curious as washerwomen to know how the thing was brought about."

"I will tell you all that I know," replied the young gentleman, "though that is but very little. When they took me to the great Châtelet, where judgment was to be pronounced, I observed few, if any persons near the entrance; but when the sentence had been read, and I had spoken what I judged right, I thought I heard, as we left the hall, a voice near me say in a low tone, 'Take courage.' I heeded it little, however; but when I passed out of the building to be led back to the petit Châtelet, I saw a great number of people round the gates, who followed us, and seemed to pity me, pressing hard upon the archers with murmurs and some shouts. The small number of men with me, the words that I had heard—which made me think that one of the two ushers was my friend—and the demeanour of the crowd, made me entertain some hopes of escape, when suddenly, as we were crossing the bridge, a fresh body of archers came up, together with an exempt and an usher, surrounding me so closely that all hope vanished. The doors of the lesser Châtelet were soon closed behind me; the jailer, who is called Bertrand Saar, sent his keys by one of the under-keepers of the prison, turning away his head, and not saying a word himself. With an usher on one side, an exempt on the other, and several persons following, I was hurried along through

great powers of sustaining fatigue, there exists a tradition that he never slept in a bed from the time he left his headquarters till he reached the French capital.

the dark corridors. As we went, some loud conversation was begun by the men behind regarding the mob, and the necessity of making haste away, lest it should increase to a dangerous extent, and stone the guards, as had been done once before. At that moment I felt the exempt draw me nearer to him by the arm, and heard him whisper, 'Yield yourself to me in all things. Be quick and dexterous in putting on what I give you, and then follow like lightning when I say the word.' By this time we were at the dungeon door. The jailer unlocked and drew it back, standing behind it with his lantern, as it filled up a considerable portion of the passage. The archers and the rest of those who had been following were kept back a step or two by what seemed to me one of their officers, who stood in the middle of the passage talking to them eagerly. The usher, the exempt, and another officer of the archers came in with me into the dungeon; and, while one snatched up the lamp, and, snuffing it against the wall, threw the whole place for a minute into darkness, the other cast this black gown over my shoulders, and put the cap upon my head. Before I was well aware what was doing, the usher pushed me out before him, saying, 'Come, let us be gone, and leave the prisoner to repose.' The officer set down the candle on the table with his back to the bed, saying 'Good-night, Monsieur de Rohan; I wish I could help you;' and then followed the rest, turning the key with his own hands, and giving it afterward to the jailer. In the mean while, the other two hurried me on, no one perceiving in the darkness and confusion that there was an exempt more than the number. The man who was by my side pushed me forward, whispering only, 'Be silent as the grave.' In passing out through the jailer's room, several were turning towards us as if to speak, and one of them asked some of the archers to drink wine; but an officer at that moment created a little confusion and jesting at the other side, by pulling the beard of Bertrand Saar, who sat half asleep over the fire. In the mean time we hastened on, and were soon past the gates. The crowd was thinner than before; but a number of persons were still there, who saluted us with hootings and stones. The order was then given for the archers to disperse and follow them; and I felt myself pulled onward by the sleeve, up one of the streets leading hith-

er. An officer of the archers was beside me, and I dared not say a word to my friend, the exempt, on the other side, for fear of betraying myself. This continued for some way, there being a group of persons running on before, and every now and then turning to throw a stone or two, which took no effect. Some other archers who were coming on soon gave up the pursuit; and what was my surprise then to see two of the mob that we had been following suddenly cease their flight and advance to meet us, saying, 'All is right! the rest are gone!' The exempt then looked round, and said aloud, 'Disperse, then, and leave him with me; I will meet you all ere daybreak to-morrow.' I then, for the first time, recognised one to whom I have owed my liberty before."

"In other words," said the Maréchal de Brissac, "our good friend the Chevalier Lenoir, or, to call him by his more formidable name, Corse de Leon. But I hope and trust that he has got into no trouble himself, for this has been a bold attempt. Where did you leave him, De Rohan?"

"At the door of the house, my lord," replied the young cavalier. "He said he would stay to see that we were not pursued, and gave me some directions for finding this room, which I wonder that I understood; for, to say sooth, my brain was, and still is, so confused and perplexed, that I scarcely even now believe that all these things are real."

"Run down, Jarnac," said the maréchal, "run down, and see that no harm befalls our good friend. Ay, De Rohan," he continued, "your brain may well turn round; for, though I have seen you front Death many a day as carelessly as if he were but your adversary at a party in the Mall, yet he bears another aspect when we sit and look upon him calmly and deliberately, without the power to struggle against him or turn away our eyes."

"Alas! my dear lord," replied De Rohan, "that was not all. Were I to choose, I certainly would meet the great foe of human life in the battle-field or before the walled city, coming on the cannon ball or on the lance's point; but still I do believe that I could meet him calmly and firmly also on the bed of sickness, or in any other way but in the shape of a dark, dishonourable end, the sport of grinning multitudes, fallen, and given up to dis-

grace, and charged with crimes my very heart abhors. It was all this that made death terrible; and now, by the sudden change of all my feelings, by this confusion of brain and perturbation of mind, I know for the first time fully how terribly apprehension and despair had cast me down."

"Well, well, repose for a moment," said Brissac, "and we will pledge you in a cup of wine, for here am I lodged, with all conveniences to boot; and in the little room hid behind the wainscot there we have both bottles and glasses, and all the refreshing aids of life. The king has sent me some choice vintages from his own cellar; for he would not have it known for half of Italy that I am in his good town of Paris; and I must needs go back before two days are over, to settle what remains unsettled in Savoy. Bring us out cups and bottles, Martigny. We must refresh our prisoner before we send him off again. Do you know, De Rohan, that you will have to ride far to-night?"

"My lord, I am quite willing," replied the young cavalier. "I cannot but feel that every moment I remain here, I peril your safety as well as my own."

"Psha!" said Brissac. "Not so, De Rohan: I am too old a soldier not to lay my plans well beforehand, and to guard against all surprise. Here is a passport for two of my followers, Monsieur de Martigny there present, and a gentleman of the name of Marli. They are very accurately described. See if you would know your own picture. It was easily obtained from the king, who is so anxious to prevent the cardinal or his brother from knowing the fact of my being in Paris, that he himself enjoined me to get my followers, few as they are, out of the city by slow degrees and quiet means. There is an order already sent to the gates to give immediate exit to two gentlemen bearing this passport, and the horses will be here ere half an hour is over. Make the best of your way to our good friends the Swiss, and then by Geneva round to Savoy. By taking that road you will not be recognised; and, when we meet among the Alps, we will arrange some farther plan for your safety and your comfort. But here come Jarnac and the chevalier. Welcome! welcome! Monsieur Lenoir. This is indeed a *coup de main* worthy of a Lautrec or a Bourbon. Is all quiet without?"

"All is quiet, my lord," replied Corse de Leon, who

stood at the end of the table while he spoke, gazing with calm seriousness sometimes on Brissac, sometimes on Bernard de Rohan, and never suffering his lip to be moved into a smile. "All is quite quiet, my lord, and will, I trust, remain so till to-morrow morning, when they must necessarily discover this gentleman's flight."

"It will be discovered ere that, I fear," replied Bernard de Rohan; "for good Father Willand left me not long ago, to bear back my reply to the king, promising to return to me speedily."

"That is unfortunate," replied Corse de Leon. "I met the good priest not long ago, and was about to make him acquainted with our plan, for he might have assisted us much. He was in haste, however, and I told him to meet me in the Arcade at the Cordeliers; but, as I passed by the spot, he had not yet arrived; and, hearing that the archers were marching down to take you to the great Châtelet for judgment, I knew that there was no time to be lost."

"From Monsieur de Rohan's account," said Brissac, "you must have had confederates among these archers."

"I had," answered Corse de Leon, dryly; "and I had archers of my own besides. The only difficulty was to find an excuse for mingling with the others; but that was soon gained by throwing a few stones; and, what between the connivance of some and the ignorance of others, the matter passed easily enough. There was many a one, doubtless, suspected something, but did not choose to speak at the time, and will take care to hold their tongues now, so that the matter may possibly never be known. That mad rebel, Janicot, indeed, had wellnigh spoiled the whole affair. As Bertrand Saar sat by the fire, resolved to see nothing of what was going on, the impudent villain pulled his beard, presenting to the eyes of the town jailer the face of the most notorious swindler in Paris, joined to the body of an archer of the prévôt's lieutenant. However, this is a sad mishap that the good priest should go thither unprepared; and there is nothing for it, my lord, but that Monsieur de Rohan should go forth at once before the alarm is given, otherwise the gates will be shut. I will leave orders for my own people, and will go with him. My horse is ready saddled. We can find the other two at the stables."

"But I have got no pass for you, my good chevalier," replied De Brissac. "The one I obtained only specifies two, and one of those must be Martigny. Come, fill up the cup, De Rohan, and drain it off. You will need strength, for there is nothing relaxes the strong sinew like grief."

"I always bear my own passport, my lord," replied Corse de Leon to that part of Brissac's speech which was addressed to him. "They do not stop me at town gates in general."

"On my life," said Brissac, "you have come very near the king's majesty, most noble chevalier. You furnish your own passports, and provide your own archers; open the doors of prisons, and cause the town gates to be unbarred at your pleasure. You surely must be the king himself."

"Not of France, nor of Paris," replied Corse de Leon, "for here we are all in bonds; but on the mountain-side, my lord, I am king—king of myself, which is the only kingdom that I covet; and now, thank Heaven, I shall be there again right soon. A city always makes me feel sickly—not in body, but in mind. Let us away, however; let us away, for there is no time to spare."

"Yet a moment," said Brissac, "yet a moment. Come with me in here, De Rohan. You are not equipped as becomes Monsieur de Marli;" and, leading his young friend through the small door in the panelling which led into a little room beyond, he soon brought him forth again with his dress completely changed, his mustaches cut short, and various other alterations effected, for the purpose of transforming his appearance. Corse de Leon, however, seemed to consider such arrangements very unnecessary, and somewhat like a waste of precious moments; for, during the whole time that they were proceeding, he stood at the end of the table with his arms still folded upon his chest, and his eyes bent down, but speaking no word to any one, and indicating a consciousness of the scene around him only by slowly beating the floor with the heel of his boot, and once or twice raising his eye to the door in the panel.

Monsieur de Martigny, who seemed to know more of the brigand than the other two gentlemen, marked the little signs of impatience that he displayed; and, in order not to waste time, prepared himself hurriedly for departure, brought his hat from the other room, buckled on

his sword, which lay upon one of the settles, filled his pockets with various things he thought might be needed on the journey, and was ready to set out when Brissac and his young friend returned. The moment they appeared, the brigand seized Bernard de Rohan by the arm, saying, "Come! come! We shall have notice given of your escape at the gates. Come!" and, without taking any farther leave of the maréchal or his companions, he hurried the young cavalier through the passage and down the stairs. Brissac followed, with Monsieur de Martigny, till they reached the door, and there, grasping De Rohan's hand, he bade God speed him, and saw him depart.

The three then walked on rapidly till they came into a small back street occupied principally by stables. Corse de Leon left them there for a moment, saying he would find his horse and come to them; and, knocking at one of the stable doors, Monsieur de Martigny led his companion into a close building, where a boy, who seemed the only person up, hastened to put the bits into the mouths of two strong horses which stood ready saddled. They were brought forth in a minute, and Bernard and his companion mounted; but, before they were well seated in the saddle, the noise of a horse's feet coming quick was heard, and Corse de Leon rode up and led them on their way.

In a few minutes they arrived at the city gates, slackening their pace as they approached for fear of exciting suspicion. All was quite tranquil, however; and an old man, who was sleeping in the lower story of a tower which then formed one of the gates of Paris, was with difficulty wakened to give them egress. Monsieur de Martigny tendered the pass; but the man, without looking at it, rubbed his sleepy eyes, saying, "I know, I know. They sent up word an hour ago. People going to join Monsieur de Brissac, are not you?"

"Exactly so," replied Martigny, with a smile; and the old man, unlocking and unbolting the heavy gates, drew them slowly back, and suffered the party to issue out into the suburb.

They all continued silent till they had passed the last houses; but when they reached a spot where the fields and vineyards began to appear around them, Corse de Leon paused for an instant upon a little rise, from which the whole city of Paris could be seen gathered together,

with the moon low down in the sky, lighting the sweet valley of the Seine, and casting the town into dark masses of deep shade.

"Now I can breathe!" he said, "now I can breathe! Oh, cursed heap of stones! while I remain in your small dens of corruption and wickedness, I feel as if the very air I breathe were thick and loathsome with every abomination under the sun; as if the sky above me were loaded with groans, and tears, and curses, and lies; and as if the ground under my feet were ready to yawn, and swallow up the abode of cruelty, and deceit, and folly in which I stand. I never enter your gates but a load like that of death seems to fall upon my heart. I never quit you but the wide world of God seems more beautiful, more sweet, more enchanting than before, from the contrast with this foul world of man's handiwork."

Having thus given vent to feelings which seemed to have been long gathering in his heart, he rode on with his two companions, and for the rest of their way during that night showed himself much more talkative than was common with him. His conversation was still of the same wild and enthusiastic tone as usual; and Monsieur de Martigny, who had a considerable share of the mere man of the world in his nature, either fell into fits of thought, scarcely attending to what he considered rambling nonsense, or merely listened to what Corse de Leon said, and smiled at his vehemence and enthusiasm.

Bernard de Rohan, on his part, however, joined in conversation with him from time to time, and at length induced him to speak calmly and connectedly on various subjects, in regard to which he required information; for, since he had been imprisoned, he had been enabled to obtain no intelligence of Isabel de Brienne, or even of the movements of the court of France. When he heard where she was, the natural desire of seeing her and informing her of his safety immediately took possession of him, and he proposed, as they passed not far from Nogent, to visit the place of her temporary abode. Monsieur de Martigny strongly opposed his wishes in this respect; but Corse de Leon listened with a smile, and said he did not see why it should not be undertaken. "There is nothing like danger," he added, "for a brave man."

CHAPTER XVI.

We must now pass over a brief space of time. It was in the spring of the year: though the bright season was still unconfirmed, the day had been as wayward as a spoiled child, now full of magical brightness and false promises of splendour, now drowned in stormy tears and overshadowed with lowering clouds. The morning had been warm and sunny, but the evening was cold and boisterous; and round the windows and doors of a tavern on the hill just above Lyons, the wind roared and the storm pelted, as if resolved to force an entrance.

In despite of the howling, however, warmth, and merriment, and loud laughter reigned within. In the wide black fireplace, enormous logs of wood blazed and crackled as if it had been winter; and, though there is every reason to believe that the fragrant and potential liquor called punch was unknown in France, and ardent spirits seldom, if ever, to be met with, yet a more generous substitute was found in the red blood of the rich grape of the Rhone, which, mulled with sugar and spices, was flowing copiously among a party of men who, seated round the table, were employing various means of setting at defiance the tempest that raged without. One personage, who had arrived later than the rest, sat tearing to pieces an enormous capon; another was finishing his dessert of dried fruits and savoury salt-meats from Italy; and the rest, who had imbibed a portion somewhat more than sufficient, perhaps, of the warm beverage we have talked of, wrangled and laughed, and jested and railed, and shook the dice and shuffled the cards with all the fierceness and reckless ribaldry which generally accompanies those diabolical inventions of the spirit of all evil. One of the men thus engaged was remarkably handsome, perhaps the word ought to be beautiful, in feature; strong and powerful, too, was he in form; but the expression of the countenance was as dark and sinister as it is possible to conceive.

Now, however, he had drank much, was winning largely, and loud laughter expanded his countenance;

but riotous merriment was not able to banish the fierce and meaning glance of his eye, or take away the bull-dog-like drawing down of the corners of his under lip, when for a moment he paused to consider his game. Whenever a turn took place in favour of his adversary, he looked at him as if he could murder him; and on the other winning one solitary game out of many, the ruffian drew his dagger from the sheath, and struck the fine blade through the whole pack of cards, nailing them to the board at which he sat. Then, casting the dice into the fire, he vowed he would play no more, and, sweeping up his winnings, took another deep draught of the hot wine.

"Well, Master Geronimo," said the man who was busy with the capon, "you have won enough for one night, I should think! You need not be in such a passion with the cards."

"I will be in a passion with anything," cried the Italian, with a fierce and beastly oath. "Nothing shall cross me without feeling my passion."

"Except our good Lord of Masseran," replied the other. "Faith, he will cross you, and you must not cross him, Master Geronimo."

"Why say you that? Why say you that?" demanded the other, fiercely, and feeling for the hilt of his sword.

"Nay, nay, be quiet," replied the other, in a calm tone. "We have but met here for one night, you going up to Paris, and we coming down from it, and we may as well spend it without brawling. How left you our good lord? How has he passed the long three months since he left us in Paris?"

"You said that I dared not cross him," said Geronimo, still returning to the matter of offence: "why said you that? If you said it out of your own head, I will cut your throat."

"It wo'n't be the first you have cut," replied the other, coolly. "But you sha'n't cut mine; for, if you show cold iron, I'll have the host and the halberdiers in: but why I said you dared not cross him, if you will know, was because I saw him push you out of his presence, with an ill word, just before he and you, and the rest of you, left Paris to go home."

"He had better not push me again!" muttered Geronimo, between his teeth, with another horrible oath: "he has more need to fear me than I have to fear him.

I could tell a tale of him, if I liked, that would set his head as high as Montfaucon, as you Frenchmen say. But no more of that! I may have to give him a sleeping dose some day. Here, some more wine! Why, the fiend have the man! he thinks we are babies, and drink out of pap-spoons."

"But tell us, Geronimo," said the other, not unwilling to change the conversation, "how have you and my lord, and the rest, passed the winter in Savoy?"

"Why, in building up the fortifications," he replied, "and listing new soldiers, and hunting wolves, and hanging five of Corse de Leon's band, whom we caught like partridges in a net, while they were helping the peasants to dig out old Gandelot's inn, which was buried in the last avalanche."

"I heard there were ten," replied the other. "You surely hanged ten, did you not?"

"Oh yes, we hanged ten," replied the man; "for we hanged all that we found, to show ourselves impartial; but five of them were peasants."

"You had better not let Corse de Leon get hold of you," replied the other.

"I should like to get hold of him," answered Geronimo: "I would soon hang him to a gutter-spout, and set him dangling from the battlements."

The other shook his head doubtfully, and looked round the room like a frightened villager after a ghost-story. "Corse de Leon," said he, at length, "is not one to be so easily dealt with. I would rather, Master Geronimo, have laid down my right hand and had it cut off, than have given him such cause for offence as you have given. He will not forget you, depend upon it."

"Let him remember me. He shall have cause!" replied Geronimo, with an air of bravado. But, nevertheless, in spite of wine and all other things, it was evident his companion's evil auguries produced an effect upon him. He fell into fits of gloomy thought, talked of other things, told various stories of the sayings and doings of the Lord of Masseran since his return to Piedmont, boasted that his master could set the Maréchal de Brissac at defiance if he thought fit, and ever and anon applied himself again to the hot wine, till his eye acquired a vacant stare, and, with a great effort, he raised himself from his seat, made his way with an unsteady

dart towards the door, and tumbled up the stairs of the inn to seek his place of repose.

After a heated and fiery night of feverish drunkenness, Geronimo woke early, just in time to hear the noise of a horse's feet quitting the door of the inn. He started out of bed, believing that the sound might be occasioned by the departure of his companions of the night before, leaving him to pursue his way towards Paris, and proceeding as rapidly as possible to Savoy. Such was not the case, however; and, when he thrust his head out of the lattice, he could see nothing but a single horseman riding away, and taking the high road for Paris. Partly dressing himself in haste, he descended to the inn-yard, and caused one of the horseboys to pour several buckets of water over his head and neck, which, although it scarcely penetrated the thick, black curls of his hair, served greatly to diminish the feverish heat which the preceding night's debauch had left.

While thus employed, the other person with whom he had wrangled on the preceding evening, and who, as we have seen, was also a follower of the Lord of Masseran, approached him with a dark but meaning smile; and, as soon as the horseboy was gone, he said, "You missed a good opportunity last night, Geronimo."

"How so? how so?" demanded the Italian: "I won every game but one."

"I speak not of the cards," answered the other. "Listen! I was up early this morning—before daylight; and, about half an hour ago, some one comes down the stairs with a quiet step. A horse was brought round; and I thought I might as well look out and see who it was. The man had got into the saddle; but I had a good look at his face as he turned in answer to the host's 'God give you good-day, sir;' and, if ever there was a face like that of Corse de Leon, it was that of him who rode away. I saw him once," he continued, seeing that Geronimo became somewhat pale, and mused for a moment or two, "I saw him once, when I was in service with the Count de Meyrand—when we made the sham attack upon my good Lord of Masseran and the young lady, and were carrying them off. You may recollect. The real brigands came up, and delivered them from us false ones."

"Ay, I recollect," replied Geronimo; "for I remember, in the first affray, I sent my sword through that

young scoundrel who was making love to Mistress Marguerite, the Lady Isabel's maid. No one looked whether the wound came from behind or before; but it settled that business, which was enough for me."

"Ah!" said the other, returning pertinaciously to the subject, which he saw annoyed his companion, "I should not wonder if this fellow—this Corse de Leon—had heard all we were saying last night, and were to keep a watch for you, Master Geronimo. He has gone straight on, upon the road to Paris."

"Which road?" demanded Geronimo, assuming a look of unconcern. "I shall go after him."

"Oh," answered the other, "he can but go one road, I imagine. He will never take the road by Moulins. That is too public for him; and, besides, the aubergiste tells me that he has taken the way to Neuville, just the same road that you are going yourself."

"Were you and I to follow him," said Geronimo, "and take him alive or dead? His head is worth a thousand crowns, at least."

"Oh, not I," answered the other; "I have no time for such an expedition. You know my lord wrote that we were to come down with all speed. But you can follow him alone, you know, Geronimo. You are just the man to cross swords with Corse de Leon."

"I shall not go out of my way to seek him," replied the bravo; "but if he should come in my way, that is another affair."

"Well," rejoined the other, "well. We will accompany you a league or so on the road as soon as we have done breakfast. That will not be much out of our way."

Geronimo did not seem at all well assured whether this proposal was palatable to him or not; for there might be an idea lurking at his heart of changing his own proposed course, and taking the road by Moulins instead of that on the Savoyard side of the Rhone. On second thoughts, however, it appeared to him that, in case of being waylaid by Corse de Leon, it would certainly be no uncomfortable thing to have a few good companions, and he trusted that he should be able to persuade them to go farther than they first intended. However that might be, it was remarkable how slow he was in despatching his breakfast, and how many little things he had to do after, which delayed him till the others became impatient.

At length, after more than an hour had been consumed in this manner, Geronimo and the other servants of the Lord of Masseran mounted their horses and rode on; but, as soon as his malicious comrade had seen him fairly on the road to Neuville, so far that he could not retread his steps without acknowledging that he was afraid of the redoubted name of the brigand, the others took their leave to a man, in spite of all entreaties, and left him to go upon his way alone.

Geronimo rode at a very slow pace, and examined carefully every object that preceded him on the way; but at length, notwithstanding his tardiness, he perceived on the road before him, at some short distance beyond Neuville, a horseman going still slower than himself. This personage was, at the moment, riding up one of the high hills which, in that part of the country, diversify the road; and, though he was at such a distance that the Italian certainly could by no means see one limb or feature distinctly, imagination immediately supplied the outline of Corse de Leon.

Geronimo showed no haste to overtake him; and, indeed, determined to cross the Saone at the very first place where he could find an opportunity. It unfortunately happened, however, that, at the top of the hill, just within sight, was a small cabaret; and, at the moment that Geronimo reached a little stream which flowed through the bottom of the valley into the Saone, he saw the wayfarer before him pull up his horse, a boy run out and catch the rein, and the rider dismount and enter the house.

Geronimo checked his beast also, and asked himself what he should do next. At first he thought of riding on as hard as possible, passing the inn, and taking a boat at Trevoux to cross the river; but then, again, a gallant determination suggested itself of going at once to the cabaret, denouncing Corse de Leon as a notorious brigand, and calling upon the host and his family for assistance in securing him.

Two or three considerations, however, prevented him from adopting this plan. In the first place, it was generally reported that Corse de Leon never travelled anywhere without having help at hand; and so sudden and wonderful had been the appearance of aiders and abettors on various occasions, that the more superstitious people of Savoy were inclined to believe that he had

an infernal confederate, whose ubiquity is very generally apparent. In the next place, the Italian had to remember that the people on that side of the Saone had a goodly reputation for occasionally plundering the boats which came down the river, and therefore that Corse de Leon might very possibly have a confederate in the host of the cabaret himself.

There was, however, one other course to be pursued, which Geronimo did not fail to adopt. By the side of the little stream that we have mentioned, a good bridle-road ran up into the country. Although well acquainted with the district, in consequence of its neighbourhood to Chambery, Geronimo was not quite sure of what town or city, village or hamlet, this might lead him to. It was easily calculated, however, that it could not take him far from Loyes or Chalamont; and one thing seemed still more certain, which was, that it would lead him out of the way of Corse de Leon. After pausing, then, for a moment, and looking with a satisfied eye at a sweet row of trees, which, even in their somewhat naked state, concealed the road from the view of any one at a distance, he turned his horse's head to the right, and rode along much more at his ease after he had lost sight of the highway to Trevoux. He met with a few impediments, indeed; for that part of the country is encumbered with large tanks, pools, and little lakes, forming the heads of various small rivers running into the Rhone, the Saone, and the Ain. The country is somewhat desolate, too; and, though at that time it was very well peopled, if we may use the term, with tall trees and thick bushes, yet human habitations were scanty, and the sight of man's face a blessing which was rarely vouchsafed to the traveller.

Geronimo, however, did not mind any of these things: certain marks and signs of a country that he knew began to appear; and a sensation of satisfaction at having left Corse de Leon far behind him, renewed his confidence in himself, and made him feel very certain that if they had met and come to blows, he would have had the advantage in the contest. He had even worked himself up into a feeling resembling regret because he had not gone on and risked his own life to gain the thousand crowns which Corse de Leon's head was supposed to be worth to any man who took it.

The sun was upon the eve of setting when he reached

one of those large clear pools that we have mentioned. It lies not very far from the small hamlet of Chalamont and the village of Marlieux, and about a mile from the spot where one of the ways from Trevoux to Bourg joins the road from Mont Luel to the latter place. A large screen of fine trees lay to the westward of this little lake; and the setting sun, casting a lengthened shadow on the glassy bosom of the water, left two thirds of the whole expanse in profound darkness, while the rest was glowing with every magnificent colour which gilds a southern sky in the last half hour of day.

There was a stillness, and a grandeur, and a solitude about the scene which was fine and solemn. Not a living creature was to be seen except when a wild water-hen, startled by the sudden appearance of the Italian, raised herself a few inches above the bosom of the lake, and skimmed along into the darkness of the shadow, carrying away a long line of rippling light behind her, as her wings and feet stirred the water over which she flew. Neither was a trace of man's footsteps to be seen, nor a sound to be heard, but the wintry cry of the woodpecker as he flew along, seeming to laugh in his own undisturbed solitude.

Geronimo was not one to feel the beauty of the scene; but its solemnity he did feel; for such spots have a something which speaks to every heart, good or bad, light or heavy, of things beyond the mere existence of the day. They may waken memories; they may arouse thoughts of the future; but, in some shape, they impel to reflection—reflection, the great chastiser of the wicked.

There were many things in the bosom of the man who there rode along which shrunk from the scourge of thought; and he was in the act of applying spurs to the sides of his jaded horse, in order to escape from the impression of the scene and reach a resting-place for the night, when suddenly, as if from the depth of the wood, a tall man on horseback came out into the road, and Corse de Leon himself stood before him.

The Italian recoiled as if he had seen a serpent; and, to say the truth, his heart sunk at the sight. It was not that he was a coward; for such was anything but the case. He was one remorseless of bloodshed; careless of human life; confident in his own powers; quick, ready, and fearless in danger. But there is almost always some one before whom the spirit fails, the heart

sinks, who is feared without even reasonable cause, and before whom Genius itself quails, as did that of Antony before Octavius. Such was the case with the man we speak of and Corse de Leon. Geronimo hated him, but feared him also; and the brigand was, perhaps, the only man that the Italian did fear. To Geronimo the soothsayer might have spoken the exact words which the poet supposes he addressed to Antony:

> "Thy spirit which keeps thee
> Is courageous, high, unmatchable,
> Where Cæsar's is not; but near him, thy angel
> Becomes a fear."

All thought of retreat, however, was now in vain. There was nothing for it but to fight. He never entertained a thought of Corse de Leon suffering him to pass unmolested. He never supposed for a moment, as many men might have thought, that the brigand, whom he had never seen but once, and then only for an instant, would not recollect him.

Had he entertained such ideas, indeed, they would have been quickly dissipated; for Corse de Leon drew up his horse within a few yards of him, and, gazing upon him with a calm and bitter smile, said, "I have been long looking for you! Get off your beast!"

"No, I will not," replied the Italian. "Why should I get off my horse?"

"Because," replied Corse de Leon, "you have given yourself a long round, and forced me to take a long round too, in order to meet you. You have had the worst road, however, and I have changed my horse since, so that yours is the most tired. Get off your horse, I say, and be quick. There is no need that any other brute should take part in the business we have to settle but yourself;" and, as he spoke, he himself dismounted.

The man slowly did as he was commanded; but, as he swung his leg out of the stirrup, Corse de Leon saw him put his hand for an instant into his bosom.

The next moment he crouched behind the beast he had been riding. There was a flash and a report, and the brigand's horse fell prone beside him as the limbs suddenly lost all power. The shot, before it reached the beast, however, passed through the breast of Corse de Leon's doublet; and, had the hand of the bravo been as steady as it usually was, the days of his adversary

had most certainly come to an end at that moment; for, with his usual fearless boldness, the brigand had sprung to the ground on the side next to his foe.

Fear, however, had done its work with Geronimo: his hand, which had seldom, if ever, been known to miss its mark, shook as he fired; but, the moment that he beheld the horse of Corse de Leon fall, while the brigand himself stood firm, he called down a dreadful curse upon his own head for his stupidity, and, nerving his heart for the last terrible struggle, drew his sword and cast away the rein.

But the more fierce from what had just occurred, Corse de Leon was upon him in a moment. Each had thrown aside his cloak; each was armed, as was customary in those days, with sword and dagger; and there were also two large pistols still undischarged at the bow of the brigand's saddle.

"You shall have fair arms, mercenary butcher," he exclaimed, as he rushed upon his adversary like an eagle in the stoop. "You shall have fair arms, though you do not deserve them. Now let us see how you dare face Corse de Leon."

Skilful as he was in all sorts of arms, making a trade of a sort of juggler-like dexterity, knowing every feint, and pass, and turn, and guard which were customary among Italian swordsmen—the most famous at that time in Europe—powerful, young, active, and fighting for life, Geronimo was nevertheless no more a match for Corse de Leon than a fox is for a lion. He felt it himself in a moment. He felt that all he could do was to prolong the struggle, to grasp by every effort at a few moments more life, in the desperate hope of some accident, some fall, some slip giving him the advantage.

The countenances of the two spoke at once the difference of their skill and powers. The Italian defended himself, and lunged at his adversary with teeth hard set, and fierce, eager, straining eyes. Corse de Leon drove him along the road, round and round the dead horse, sometimes against the bank, sometimes to the margin of the water, with a stern brow, indeed, and a quick and a glancing eye, but with a calm, contemptuous smile upon his lip, that seemed to show he held him in utter scorn.

Notwithstanding his superiority, however, although the point of his sword kept playing round the blade of

his adversary as if it were a matter of mere amusement, and every now and then quivered within an inch of his bosom, still he suffered Geronimo to escape the death which seemed imminent at each instant. The bravo felt that Corse de Leon was playing with him. It seemed like a sort of mental torture to which the other was subjecting him, to keep him long in the struggling agonies of death before he slew him. The torment became too great to bear; and he lunged more and more fiercely, almost anxious to bring the contest to an end any how; but at length a faint hope came over him. The brigand might wish to subdue him, but to spare his life; and he exclaimed, in a somewhat humble tone, "You take not your full advantage, noble sir! What would you have?"

"I will tell you soon," replied Corse de Leon; and, almost at the same moment, the Italian received a severe wound in the shoulder, which deluged his arm and side with blood. "Now," exclaimed Corse de Leon, sternly, "tell me who it was that slew Henry of Brienne."

"I know not," answered the man, doggedly, dropping his sword's point, and retiring a step in order to keep upon his guard; "I know not! Bernard de Rohan, I suppose."

"Do you think," said Corse de Leon, gazing sternly in his face, "do you think Nature is herself so false as to suffer you to utter such a base lie without writing the refutation upon your dogged brow? Your life is in my hands, and I again demand the truth of you. You cannot deceive me, for I know that you were alone with Henry of Brienne at the very time the murder must have taken place. I ask you, Did you kill him? and if you did, will you bear witness against the man that set you on?"

"As I hope for salvation, and believe in the Holy Mother," replied the man, "*I* did not kill him."

"Then who did?" demanded the brigand, fiercely. "You were the accomplice, if not the doer of the deed. Answer me, I say, for I will know."

"If I tell, will you spare my life?" demanded the man. "Will you spare my life, and let me go free?"

Corse de Leon rolled his eyes over him sternly and fiercely, leaning upon his sword, and seeming to be agitated by a strong struggle within himself. "I will not promise!" he replied, at length. "Butcher, I will

not promise! You owe me much blood; but be you sure, at all events, that if you do not tell, you die within this half hour."

"Then have at you at once," exclaimed the Italian; and, springing across the intervening space with one of those fierce bounds for which his nation were then famous, he endeavoured to strike his dagger into the heart of his adversary.

He knew not the man with whom he had to contend, however; and, in an instant, before he could strike the blow, the right hand of Corse de Leon grasped his wrist with an iron pressure that nothing could resist, and the dagger which armed the brigand's left passed through his adversary's shoulder, and made him writhe for a moment with intense pain. Corse de Leon cast him back upon the sand, and all consciousness seemed to leave the dark eyes of the Italian, who, after rolling for a moment in agony, gave a sharp shudder and became quite still.

The brigand turned him over with his foot, looked at the wound, and put his hand upon his heart, murmuring, "I hope I have not killed him! If I have, we have lost the clew." He raised himself up again, however, the next moment with a smile, saying, "He is not dead! It is but the pain! He will soon be upon his feet again!" and, unbuckling his belt, he tied it tightly round the bravo's arms. He then uttered his own loud whistle, and in a few minutes two other horsemen stood beside him. Not many words were spoken; but, ere a quarter of an hour more had passed, the spot where the strife had taken place had resumed its silent solitude, and no other evidence of the events just recorded remained, except a dark pool of blood here and there, and the dead horse of the brigand, stripped of its trappings.

CHAPTER XVII.

Were this work a romance instead of a true history, it might be necessary to apologize for turning from more stirring scenes to speak of some of the dry details

of policy, the movements of armies, and the intrigues of courts. On such political themes, however, we shall pause as little as possible, inasmuch as, even in the truest history, they are of very little importance when compared with the movements of the heart of man, the efforts of his mind, or the progress of his understanding.

During the autumn of 1558, and in the winter and spring of 1559, the difficult negotiations still continued which terminated in the pacification of Europe by the peace of Cateau Cambresis. But, in the mean time, while great efforts were made in the cabinet by each party to gain the utmost on its own side, the same took place in the field, and the immortal name of Guise acquired additional glory by defending the northern frontier of France, by driving back the enemies of his country beyond her old established boundaries, and by interposing the shield of his valour and his skill between the throne of his sovereign and a successful enemy.

The troops, however, which were required to enable him to effect such great things, left the conquests of France in Savoy and Piedmont, to all appearance, at the mercy of the foe. With scarcely a handful of men, the Maréchal de Brissac remained to struggle against the whole power of the house of Austria, against the policy of Philip and Ferdinand, the arts of a thousand Italian diplomatists, and the treachery of a multitude of petty princes, whose strength was in their falsehood.

But still the vigour, the skill, and the courage of Brissac supplied all deficiencies. He met the enemy at all points where they were found in arms. He appeared suddenly in places where he was never expected; and, with quick decision, he cut through negotiations which were supposed to be the most secret. He could not, it is true, put an entire stop to the traffic in small sovereigns which was carried on by the houses of Austria and Savoy; but sometimes he stopped defection by force, sometimes by threats, sometimes by gratuities, and still his extraordinary energy, and the activity and daring of those about him, succeeded in maintaining the whole tract of country intrusted to him for defence against everything that could be done by the skilful adversaries to whom he was opposed.

In some instances, indeed, he even assumed the offensive, though with a defensive view, and seized upon towns and fortresses which might serve as outposts for

the protection of Piedmont. Many of these surprises were carried on at night; and, whenever such was to be the case, the enterprise was conducted by volunteers, selected as short a time as possible before the execution of the project. On all these occasions, during the winter and spring of 1559, the detachment destined for the assault began its march without any apparent commander. The first time such an event happened, some doubts and hesitations spread among the men; and the officers themselves inquired who was leading them. The answer made was an exhortation to be satisfied, for that a commander would not be wanting at the moment of need. Some whispered that Brissac himself had gone on before; some that he was following quickly after; but, when the attack was really to commence, a leader taller and more powerful than the maréchal appeared among them, with words inspiring all that heard him with zeal and determination, and leading them with a degree of skill, presence of mind, and daring that crushed resistance and commanded success.

His pertinacious resolution, his fiery courage, was the theme of every lip. Where the spears crossed and the swords waved the thickest, at the very muzzle of the flashing arquebus and in the blaze of the cannon, there was his form seen, with often none but enemies around him. When the victory was won, when the place was gained, when the power of France was firmly established therein, the leader disappeared, and was no more seen till the fierce strife was roused again in another quarter, and the same deeds were once more to be done.

Covered with the armour which was then universally worn, his features were never seen: some vowed that they recognised his voice, some recollected having beheld such feats performed in other fields, but no one refused to follow him, none hesitated to obey his commands. The soldiery themselves seemed to regard him as the fierce angel of war, leading them on to certain success; and the nobles looked at the gilded spurs buckled over the boots, and, satisfied of his station, required no farther assurance.

In the mean time, except when called forth to face, with his sudden energy, some more extraordinary danger, Brissac remained generally at his headquarters, and there, turning his eyes from point to point, he met and

frustrated the wiles of the thousand adversaries by whom he was surrounded. About the period of the spring to which we have led the reader in our last chapter, his attention was called to some proceedings which were taking place in Savoy, and especially to the conduct of the Lord of Masseran. That nobleman had strengthened the fortifications of his castle in the neighbourhood of Chambery; and he had also added several new works to another place, of, perhaps, still greater importance, which communicated with the former one by a long valley leading towards the Milanese. Towers were erected at various intervals; barriers and bridge-heads were strongly fortified along the course of the stream; and, to whatever purpose the wily Italian might intend to turn his advantage, it was evident that he was labouring to obtain means of commanding the communication between the dominions of Spain and those territories occupied by France in Savoy.

It must be recollected that he was in the rear of Brissac himself; and although he gave the most positive assurances that all he was doing was for the service of France, the maréchal repeated more than once the strictest injunctions to desist. Those injunctions, however, had hitherto proved vain; the fortifications still continued; and, although the farther progress of the negotiations for the peace were by this time so far advanced that little or no doubt could be entertained of its being fully concluded before many months were over, yet it became evident that Savoy was endeavouring to assume an attitude of menace, to render the treaty more favourable to herself, and that the crown of Spain was very willing to push her advantages, while plenipotentiaries spent their time at both courts in diplomatic technicalities.

There were more unequivocal, though minor signs also of a determination on the part of the Lord of Masseran, if not absolutely to abandon the cause of France, so far to betray the interests of that power as to make up for his former treachery to his own sovereign, now that the duke was likely to be restored to his rights.

The same constant communication by couriers, which had attracted the attention of Brissac in the preceding year, now again took place between the castle of Masseran and the Milanese. The servants of the marquis were recalled from Paris; and every object of value,

which either belonged to himself or to which he could lay any claim as the husband of the Countess of Brienne, was brought at different times and by various manners into Savoy.

More than once Brissac wrote to the King of France, informing him that such was the case, and asking his permission to treat the marquis as an open enemy; but Henry, with the prospect of a speedy pacification before his eyes, had grown somewhat supine, and he treated the proposal coldly, saying that "it was needless to make enemies where they did not exist."

Brissac, however, soon after gained some farther information, which made him determine to cross the mountains and examine the conduct of the Lord of Masseran with his own eyes. The little inn kept by the aubergiste Gandelot had, as the reader is aware, been swept away by an avalanche not many weeks before; but, with the pertinacity of mountaineers, the host and his wife, who had been rescued from their fallen dwelling, were even at this time busy in reconstructing an abode of the same kind exactly on the spot where the old inn had stood. Some progress had been made in the work; and already a large wooden cottage had been framed, which afforded sufficient accommodation for chance guests at that early season of the year.

It was at the door of this dwelling that the Maréchal de Brissac stopped on his arrival from Piedmont, and here he was met by two French officers who had been a short time in that neighbourhood, and who now remained in conference with their commander for more than an hour. When their private interview was ended, Brissac, who, we find, was only accompanied by five or six gentlemen, sent to inform the Lord of Masseran of his arrival, and to require his presence at the inn.

That nobleman speedily appeared, followed by a large and powerful train; and Brissac, after receiving him with some coldness, informed him that when he had come thither it was with a determination to inspect the line of fortresses which had been formed between that spot and the Milanese, but that important intelligence which he had just received compelled him to return immediately to Turin.

"I shall therefore, Monsieur de Masseran," he said, "confide the task to Monsieur de Thermes, whom you already know. He will be sent here immediately after

my return; and as he will come accompanied by only twelve gentlemen, I shall feel myself bound to cause a part of my forces to advance to the neighbourhood of your lands on the other side of the mountains, so that the slightest wrong done to him or to his companions may be fully avenged a few hours after it takes place. You will therefore be good enough to suffer him to make that inspection which I judge necessary, and to give him safe conduct back to my headquarters at Turin."

The Maréchal de Brissac was not a man to bandy words with, as the Lord of Masseran well knew, and therefore he merely bowed low and promised punctually to obey, feeling that such words need not in the slightest degree affect his after-conduct. What passed in his breast during the interview it would be hard to say; for Brissac was so scantily accompanied that, had the Lord of Masseran thought fit, or had he been prepared for a *coup de main*, there can be no doubt he might have effected it at that moment with ease, and perhaps with safety.

On many occasions, very daring men, and very wise ones, owe more to the fears and to the ignorance of their opponents than to their own courage or wisdom, and such was the case with Brissac in the present instance. The marquis left him unmolested and returned to his chateau, and Brissac recrossed the mountains, and arrived in safety at his headquarters at Turin.

When the Lord of Masseran was once more within his own walls, he in some degree blamed himself for having suffered the maréchal to escape. Nevertheless, on farther reflection, he argued that he had done right. "Had I," he said, "had I given way to the temptation, it might have put the whole of Piedmont at the disposal of Spain; but to do that before my bargain is made would be to put myself at the disposal of Spain also. To the King of France it would have been a mortal and unforgiveable offence; and if Philip and the duke are unprepared, or should not think fit to take advantage of the opportunity, I should be left to bear the blame and the punishment. Before this Monsieur de Thermes comes, however, all must and will be settled; and any movement of Brissac himself towards the other lands will give me a fair excuse for arresting his deputy and keeping him a close prisoner till the matter is decided

one way or the other. He shall make no reports! That I will take care of, and especially no reports about this new business. It is a hard game to play between these two countries. Were this girl's life out, or her vow pledged to the altar, it might be worth my while to attach myself to France; but while she lives, Savoy and Spain must be the lands. Would that Meyrand were come! I might then use his weak, vain eagerness to drive her into a cloister. His mad passion and his present fit of despair will lead him to anything. What fools men are to love anything but themselves! The moment they do so, they put themselves in the power of others. I wish Meyrand were come. The fool has become a mere instrument, and may be led to anything."

If it be asked whether the Lord of Masseran absolutely uttered such words, the reply must be, he did not; for he was, in general, a great deal too wise to give his counsel even to the emptiest room. But he undoubtedly so thought, and the words were spoken with his heart if not with his tongue, confirmed as he was in the pride of his cunning by the overthrow of the unfortunate Bernard de Rohan, and firmly believing that his art could, and would, finally triumph over every one.

Cunning, however, almost always weaves around herself a net, which she fondly fancies is made for others, but in which she is at last entangled herself. One fine thread is brought across another, to guard against a danger in this place; a new mesh is provided to prevent the escape of the prey in that; and hour by hour, and moment by moment, the web becomes more intricate, the toils more difficult to escape from. All the time, however, she glories and takes a pleasure in the work, repairing like a spider the meshes where they break or fail, and fancying that they must succeed at length.

Very often, to the cunning man, the very delight which he feels in practising his art renders it, as it were, a necessity of his nature; and, in almost all instances, we find that the object to be attained (independent of that delight) is altogether incommensurate with the labour, and the care, and the thought. The Lord of Masseran, however, was working, and had been working, from the time that he had married the Countess of Brienne, for two great and, to him, important objects: namely, to gain from France every part of the succes-

sion of the late count that avarice could grasp at, and art or daring reach, and to wring from the sovereigns of Spain and Savoy all that a double and treacherous policy could obtain from the difficulties that surrounded them in their Italian dominions.

The only one who now stood between him and the possession of the whole estates in France was Isabel de Brienne. There were three ways of removing the obstacle: death, a vow to the veil, or a marriage with the Count de Meyrand, who, in the eagerness of the passion that possessed him, would be willing, the Lord of Masseran well knew, to sacrifice everything as the price of obtaining her.

Her death was a thing very familiar to the thoughts of good Monsieur de Masseran; but, strange to say, notwithstanding the whole that the reader knows, and the rest that he suspects, he felt a repugnance to employ the means then very commonly used to obtain his object.

In what complicated motives this repugnance originated would take too much time to investigate. Fear of failing might have some share; the difficulty of executing the deed in perfect secrecy, the dread of incurring such an amount of suspicion as would justify Spain and Savoy, while taking advantage of his services, to grant him no rewards themselves, and abstain from demanding of France, in the negotiations then proceeding, that compensation or equivalent for the whole lands of Brienne which it was his great object to obtain; for, be it remembered, he never dreamed of rendering himself a French vassal, but merely strove, in the struggle of parties, to obtain the worth of the estates rather than the estates themselves.

To the Count de Meyrand then turned the hopes of the Lord of Masseran; not that he believed that Isabel would ever give the count her hand, but he thought that there was a fair probability of driving her, by persecution, into a cloister, and of leaving her no choice but either to wed Meyrand, after such a bargain was made as would secure her whole possessions to the Lord of Masseran, or to bury herself in a nunnery.

How this was to be effected may be asked by those who know how skilfully her escape had been effected, and that the place of her retreat was still unknown to the whole court of France; but the Lord of Masseran

had obtained a clew, or, at least, imagined that he had, to her present abode, and his purpose now was to make the discovery of that secret the price of his proposed arrangement with the Count de Meyrand.

Such subtle schemes as these occupied him during the whole of that day. Towards evening he received letters from the governor of the Milanese, informing him that the position which Spain had been enabled to assume at the conferences, partly in consequence of his own manœuvres and the threatening attitude of things in Italy, had already had considerable effect. He smiled as he read the despatch, and sent off another in reply, telling the Spaniard that he had been visited by the Maréchal de Brissac, and throwing out a hint that it was high time some definite advantage should be promised him in case of his absolute declaration in favour of the Spanish cause.

The next morning while pondering over all these matters, shortly after the morning meal, it was announced to him that the Count de Meyrand and thirty men-at-arms were below, at the gates of the castle, demanding admittance. At first the number of retainers startled the good lord; and though, upon consideration of his own forces, any risk in admitting them disappeared, he still thought it prudent to beseech the count to send off one half of his train to the castle of Robeck, some twenty miles farther up the valley. Meyrand hesitated not a moment; and, having given the necessary orders, entered the fortress with the rest.

There was not upon his countenance even any appearance of mortification or discontent; but, grasping the hand of the Lord of Masseran eagerly, after looking round the room to see that no one was present, he exclaimed, "So, you have discovered her retreat. You must have the eyes of a lynx. Where is she to be found?"

"Nay," replied the Lord of Masseran, "I have not absolutely discovered it, and I shall have to give an immense reward to the person who is to reveal it to me."

The Count de Meyrand gazed upon him for a single instant with a scornful smile: "I understand you," he said. "Name the price. Be it what it will, you shall have it, though I am wellnigh beggared already. But I must be sure, Masseran—I must now be made quite sure."

"You shall be quite sure," replied the Lord of Masseran; "for that which I demand is still only conditional upon your marriage with her. I will come to the object at once. You shall sign me over her whole rights in the succession of Brienne. I will discharge whatever reward may be necessary, and call upon you for nothing. The rest is your own affair."

Meyrand's cheek, which, since we first saw him, had gradually changed its hue and become very pale, glowed somewhat redly for an instant; but he then replied, "Your demands are large, De Masseran. Give me the paper, however; I will sign it in an instant; for, as you say, the rest is my own affair, and I am no longer the fool that I have been. I cast from me now all scruples, all hesitation. I depend upon myself alone, and will suffer nothing now to stop me on my way. But still you must help me and give me aid, though it be but in a small degree. Place her within my grasp! Give me any strong place of refuge to which I can carry her sufficiently far from France and from French dominion to escape in case of need! Find me a priest that will read 'no' for 'yes;' and, if she escape four-and-twenty hours without being my wife, take my sword and break it over your knee as a boy's lath."

"I will do all that you require," replied the Lord of Masseran. "Some of your men have already gone on to the chateau of Robeck. There you may set half the world at defiance, and escape when you will over the mountains to Milan. There is a priest, too, in the place, ready and willing to do whatever is required for a dozen crowns. But still bethink you, count, will it not be better to have the king's consent, and let the whole thing go on smoothly?"

"No, no," answered Meyrand, sharply: "I tell you, De Masseran, as soon as I received your letter, I informed the king that I was going forth to seek her, with hopes of success, and I asked his sanction to our immediate marriage. He rebuffed me coldly; told me that, for the offence I had given in the past, he had vowed I should never have her hand; ordered me, if I found her, to give instant information to his nearest officer, and to return to his court immediately. My choice is made, my course is taken. Where is this paper? I will sign it at once."

"My good friend, it is not drawn yet," replied the

Lord of Masseran. "I could not tell that you would consent. It will soon be drawn, however. But where is my man Geronimo? Has he not come back?"

"I know not," replied the Count de Meyrand. "I have never seen him."

"Why, did he not bear my letter?" demanded the Lord of Masseran.

"Not he," answered the Count de Meyrand. "It came by the king's common courier from Lyons."

The Lord of Masseran at first made no reply, but gazed sternly on the ground for an instant, and then muttered, "Some of his debaucheries! But come," he added, with a faint, unpleasant smile, "we will go visit my lady wife. You need some refreshment."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was just a day and a half after the arrival of the Count de Meyrand, that the Lord of Masseran, on returning in haste from the castle of Robeck, heard that a messenger waited him, announcing the approach of Monsieur de Thermes. News had reached the ears of the crafty Savoyard during that day which made a bitter smile come upon his countenance at this information; for, to say the truth, he had much doubted that the French officer would make his appearance. He had still more doubted that his train would be so small as it was reported to be; and he ordered a careful watch to be held from one of the towers, in order to ascertain that not more than fourteen or fifteen persons accompanied Monsieur de Thermes up the long valley which led from Gandelot's inn to the castle. Everything, however, was perfectly satisfactory. The numbers reported by the warder were not more than twelve; and when the French officer appeared in the hall where the Lord of Masseran waited to welcome him, he apologized for coming at all, saying, "Monsieur de Brissac, my lord, has received information since last you saw him, which might, perhaps, have spared me the necessity of making a visit of this kind at all; but, as I was partly on my way, and had business to settle with the

Count de Birague and Monsieur d'Acigné, I thought it better to come on and crave your hospitality for a single night."

The Lord of Masseran bowed low and smiled sweetly, saying that he was delighted to see Monsieur de Thermes, and hoped that he would make a longer stay, as he was himself most anxious to show him the line of fortresses he had been constructing, and to prove how clearly they were destined for the service of France. "But let us come, my lord, to the banquet hall," he said. "Such poor entertainment as my table can give you is already prepared, and nothing is wanting but that you should enter the room; and let us wash before dinner."

"I will pray you, my Lord of Masseran," said Monsieur de Thermes, "before we sit down, to send one of your people to the little inn hard by, to tell Monsieur d'Acigné or Monsieur Birague, whichever may happen to arrive there first, to come hither and speak with me. My business with them will be soon ended, and your messenger may say that both need not come unless they wish it."

Thus saying, he followed the Lord of Masseran towards the banquet hall, where silver basins and ewers were brought forward for the French general and his followers to wash their hands, as it was at that time customary to do in public on such occasions, and in a few minutes the two gentlemen were seated together at the social board. All was luxurious and choice, according to the notions of those times; and one or two dishes had succeeded each other, had been tasted by the various guests and passed away, when an attendant entered, and, after speaking for a moment to the Lord of Masseran, approached Monsieur de Thermes and said, "There are some peasants here, sir, from the valley of Saint Vial, who say that Monsieur de Brissac sent them word you would speak to them this day regarding the privilege of cutting wood upon the mountain side, which they claim."

"Tell them I am engaged," replied De Thermes, with a look of annoyance. "Bid them come to-morrow: or, stay—it is a long way—let them wait in the court, and I will see them after dinner. You and I will see them together, Monsieur de Masseran, for this matter in some degree concerns you. Your lands extend in that

quarter, and Monsieur de Brissac would not ratify the privilege required without consulting you; for, inasmuch as he is careful that every one should do right by him, so is he anxious to do right by every one."

The Lord of Masseran grinned, saying, "He is a very famous and excellent person, Monsieur de Thermes. Bid the peasantry stay in the court."

"If my friend, Monsieur Birague, comes," said De Thermes, addressing the attendant before he quitted the hall, "I beseech you show him in. I will crave, Monsieur de Masseran, a cup of wine for him and a crust of bread, for he has to ride far, you know."

"Most willingly, most willingly!" replied the Lord of Masseran; and the dinner went on for some time with great zeal and activity.

At length there was a noise heard as of men's feet approaching; and Monsieur de Thermes, looking towards the door, exclaimed, with a gay air, "Here is Birague, doubtless—Ah! Birague and Acigné too. Welcome, welcome, my good friends! But what a number of followers you bring with you: some of them had better not come farther than the door. My Lord of Masseran," he continued, rising, and speaking in a graver tone, "I grieve to say that the king, having received undeniable proofs that you have betrayed the trust reposed in you, and that you have agreed, in consideration of a sum—It *is* of no use flying to the window, my lord; the castle is in possession of the troops of France—I was going to say, that as, in consideration of a sum of two hundred thousand florins of gold, and the whole tract of country lying between Aosta and Cordoniere, you have agreed to deliver into the hands of Spain the whole of your castles and forts on this side of the Alps, the king, by the mouth of Monsieur de Brissac, has commanded me to arrest your person and to take possession of all your strong places. I have to request that you will give me up your sword."

The picture of despair and terror, the Marquis of Masseran gazed round him with wandering and straining eyes, with lips and cheeks livid with fear, and with his knees shaking under him. The French officers had risen at the same time as Monsieur de Thermes, forming a band of fourteen stout and determined men, all well armed and prepared for the business which brought them thither. At the great doors of the hall were Bi-

rague and Acigné, with such a number of followers as completely to block up the entrance; and in a part of the court which could be seen from the window appeared the peasantry from the valley of Saint Vial, with drawn swords and pistol in hand, certainly much more like disguised men-at-arms than simple countrymen, mastering the Italian soldiery of the castle, and planting the banner of France upon the opposite walls.

"You see," exclaimed De Thermes, pointing to the scene before him, and then looking around upon the pale faces of the half dozen Savoyard attendants that the hall contained, "you see, my lord, that all resistance is in vain. Give up your sword with a good grace. Birague, how many men have you in the castle with you?"

"One with another, general," he replied, "we have at least two hundred, and I think one half that number would do."

The Lord of Masseran unbuckled his sword, and with downcast eyes gave it to the French officer, saying, "I do not know what your orders are, sir, but I trust that the king will let me be heard before he affects my life."

"His majesty, sir," replied Monsieur de Thermes, with a smile at his terror, "his majesty does not pretend to judge you, or to affect your life at all. He does not forget that you are a sovereign prince, sir, and only requires that your castles and strong places should be given up to him, and your person put under restraint, in order to prevent your injuring him, contrary to your oath and special agreement, and endangering the peace of Europe, which is now, happily, likely to be restored. The condition and manner of your imprisonment will greatly depend upon yourself, and upon your reply to what I have to demand of you. First, I have to require that you sign an order to all your officers, seneschals, and lieutenants, to give up possession of your fortresses and strong places to the King of France, at the very first summons and requisition, or to maintain the same at their own proper peril."

"I will sign it instantly!" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran; "I will sign it this moment!" and then, beckoning one of his terrified attendants to him, he said aloud, "Fetch me paper and ink." But, as the man came near, he added in a whisper, "Fly to the castle of Robeck

with all speed, and tell what has happened. They are in my cabinet," he continued; "there are pens in the drawer above the great oak chest."

The Italian had well chosen his time, for Monsieur de Thermes had turned away to speak with Acigné, and the officer on the other side was making a jesting observation to his next neighbour on the facility with which their *coup de main* had been executed. No one marked the short whisper of the Lord of Masseran; and it was not perceived that the attendant who brought in materials for writing was not the same who had been ordered to bring them.

"Now, my good lord," said Monsieur de Thermes, "you will be pleased to sign a general order, in the terms I have prescribed, for the surrender of all your fortresses and castles into the hands of the King of France; and I will beg you to make it as strong as you can in language, that the necessity of bloodshed and of the destruction of your own property may be avoided, and that peaceable possession may be taken by the troops of France—"

"I can assure you, general," interrupted the Lord of Masseran, who was beginning in some degree to recover courage, "I can assure you most solemnly that my intentions—"

"Are fully displayed," said Monsieur de Thermes, interrupting him, "by the following letters, which, according to this schedule, are in the hands of Monsieur de Brissac. First, a letter to the Governor of Milan, stating that you accept the proposal of his majesty the King of Spain, and are ready on Tuesday next, the fifteenth of the month, to deliver into his hands two of the fortresses stipulated, upon the payment of the first instalment, and the regular cession of the equivalent territories granted by the Duke of Savoy. Secondly, a letter to the Duke of Savoy, dated the twentieth of last month, and despatched to him in the Low Countries, across the very kingdom of France itself."

"Geronimo has betrayed me," muttered the Lord of Masseran between his teeth; "I wish my dagger were within his heart."

"A letter," continued Monsieur de Thermes, "by which you assure the duke that your adhesion to the court of France has only been compulsory; that you are now, as ever, his faithful vassal; and that, if he will

contrive to give frequent occupation to France on the northern frontier, you, by introducing the Spaniards into Savoy, will enable him to render the treaty of peace now negotiating infinitely advantageous to him. Thirdly—"

"There is no use of proceeding farther, sir," said the Marquis of Masseran, with an air of injured honesty. "By what you have just stated, it is evident to me that a very extensive forgery has been carried on against me for the purpose of revenge, if not under the incentive of a bribe. These letters can but have been written in my name by one person. I have long had about me a man of the name of Geronimo—Geronimo Porta—a person uncommonly skilful in counterfeiting all sorts of hands, and who, having been often at my side while I have been writing, must have been well acquainted with mine. Having reason, about the middle of last month, to know that he had committed a very inhuman murder, I ordered him to be arrested in order to execute him for the crime. He contrived, however, to make his escape; and the present charge against me is evidently the result of his malice. May I ask if he has fallen into the hands of Monsieur de Brissac? Should such be the case, I can prove that he deliberately murdered one of my wife's attendants out of jealousy, having had some cause to suppose that the man was a favoured lover of a woman named Marguerite, the waiting-maid of Mademoiselle de Brienne."

Monsieur de Thermes had heard him to the end with every appearance of attention; but he then replied, "You are mistaken, sir. This correspondence did not come into the hands of Monsieur de Brissac from the person you mentioned. They were delivered to him by a different individual. However, the best way of showing your real intentions will be to draw up the papers we mentioned immediately. I must now retire to make those necessary arrangements in the castle which the change of circumstances may require, and I trust that at my return I shall find the authorization I have suggested fully drawn out and signed."

He spoke in a tone which admitted no answer, and then proceeded into the courtyard, and round all the works and defences of the castle, seeing that the soldiers of the Lord of Masseran were everywhere completely disarmed, and the castle in full possession of

the French troops. As soon as this was done he returned to the hall, and there found the paper drawn up in the terms he had dictated.

He examined it carefully and scrupulously; and then, turning to the Lord of Masseran with that sort of politeness which is often more cutting than mere scorn, he said, "I grieve very much, Monsieur de Masseran, to be obliged to verify the old story of the hedgehog and the rabbit, and, having come here as your guest, be compelled to drive you out of your own home. My orders are strict, however, to send you immediately over the frontier into France, where a convenient abode will assuredly be found for you by the king. A party of my men will escort you towards Latour in half an hour, and, in the mean time, my friend, Monsieur de Birague, will attend upon you in the castle. I myself must ride on, as I intend to summon the castle of Robeck early to-morrow morning, it being now so late that I shall not arrive in time to do it this night."

Thus saying, with a formal bow, Monsieur de Thermes took his leave, while the Marquis of Masseran remained for half an hour a prisoner in his own castle, and was then conducted to France under a strong escort. No one was permitted to accompany him but his wife and one attendant, and the former left him soon after, nominally to plead his cause at the court of France, but in reality to place herself under the protection of the king, and to withdraw herself from a cold tyranny, which vanity had made her bear for a long time without resistance, but which had at length reached a pitch where it became utterly insupportable.*

* Not to take what does not belong to me without proper acknowledgment, I feel myself bound to state, that the whole of the last chapter is very little better than a free translation of the passage in the Life of Brissac relating to the surprise of the Lord of Maseran and his castle.

CHAPTER XIX.

On the night which succeeded the events we have related in the last chapter, the Maréchal de Brissac sat alone in his cabinet, towards two o'clock in the morning. He was not, however, so far from the scene of events as the Lord of Masseran had supposed, having stopped at Montmeillan in order to hear the result of the proceedings which he had arranged with Monsieur de Thermes. The principal part of his forces were on the other side of the Alps, but still in the strong town where he halted he had a large body of troops, and, never losing a moment of his time, he was carrying on from it as many important operations as when he was in the heart of Piedmont itself.

He was now writing the last despatch of the day, after almost all his household and his principal officers had retired to rest, and he had nearly finished the task, when an attendant from the antechamber entered the room, and told him that somebody without wished to see him in haste.

"Who is it?" demanded the maréchal.

"It is the person you always see, my lord," replied the attendant.

"Then let him in at once," replied Brissac; and in another minute Corse de Leon stood before him.

"Now, my good friend," said Brissac, "what are your news? Something important, I am sure."

"Less important to you, perhaps," replied Corse de Leon, "than to many people; for, though you do not altogether attend, as most men do, to the petty policies of a base world, still you must make policy your first consideration. However, it is of importance even to you, and still more to me and others."

"And you have every right to consideration," replied Brissac. "I have often told you that, in gratitude for all the services you have rendered, I will willingly do anything for you that my personal means may afford, or that my utmost interest and influence with the King of France can effect."

"I know your generosity," replied Corse de Leon,

with a smile which had nothing of the bitter in it that generally mingled more or less with every expression of his countenance. "I recollect well the time when, to remove all difficulties from the projects of his king, the Maréchal de Brissac voluntarily offered to serve under a less experienced commander, losing all his authority and one half of his revenue; and I have seen him, to reward a common soldier, give the last ducat out of his own purse when the treasury of the army was exhausted. But such things are not the question now. The matter that I have in hand deserves some attention from you; and, for reasons best known to myself, I call upon you to be present in person on the spot where an event of apparently minor importance is about to take place. De Thermes has succeeded in all things as yet, and the Lord of Masseran is now a prisoner in France."

"For which we have principally to thank you," said Brissac.

But the brigand went on without noticing the interruption. "De Thermes arrived within a league of Robeck last night. It was necessary, however, to leave half of his men to guard what he had secured. He has not more than a hundred or a hundred and ten effective men with him. There are at least two hundred in the castle of Robeck, and they are apprized of what has taken place with regard to their lord."

"But they will surrender," said Brissac. "The hearts of such people have very thin blood in them in general; and they will see the folly of resisting."

"No, they will not," replied Corse de Leon. "They will see no such folly in it, with Spanish troops ready to pour in from the Milanese. Messengers have already gone to call for aid; and, besides, the castle is not defended by one of this petty traitor's own people."

"By whom, then?" demanded Brissac.

"By a rebel and a knave," replied Corse de Leon; "one of the bold-hearted villains of our own native land."

"Ha!" said Brissac; "who may that be?"

"None other," answered the brigand, "but the sweet, fair, courtly, indifferent Count de Meyrand."

"Heaven and earth!" exclaimed Brissac, starting up, and adding, the moment after, "Even if he be there, carrying on some of his base designs with the Lord of

Masseran, he will never dare to resist the arms of France."

"You will see!" answered Corse de Leon, "you will see! He who has not scrupled to betray his friend, will not scruple to betray his king or his country either. He is too far plunged in, my lord, to have any hope in turning back again. Even now I know that he has set De Thermes at defiance, fired upon the officer who was sent to summon the place, and—not in his own name, it is true, but in the name of one of the Savoyard's men—has declared that the authorization to give up the castle to France, which Masseran signed this day, null and of no effect, as the giver of it was in prison and under compulsion at the time."

"This must be seen to!" said Brissac, walking up and down the cabinet, "this must be seen to!" and it was remarkable that the act of rebellion on the part of a French nobleman, which the brigand attributed to the Count de Meyrand, seemed to affect the maréchal much more than any or all the many mortifications and disappointments which he met with during the course of his command in Italy. "It is difficult to know how to manage this affair," he added; "I ordered three hundred men to march for Pignerol at daybreak, and they cannot well be spared. What number can you help us with, chevalier?"

"Enough to take the castle by storm," replied Corse de Leon, boldly; "and I will lead them myself. But you must be present, maréchal."

"That I will, of course," answered Brissac. "Not in command, for I must not take it from De Thermes, but as a witness of the whole; and I will bring all the men with me that can be spared, to aid in your attempt."

"We shall need no great aid, I think," replied Corse de Leon; "I seldom fail. But still I might be killed, and then a reserve were good. Yet I know not how it is, the balls seem to forget me, and cold iron to turn soft upon my flesh. I shall learn to think myself a magician some day, as the poor people of the country do. However, there is no time to be lost, if you are to bring men with you. Remember, 'tis a long march, and mischief may be done if the attack be delayed."

Brissac smiled. "I am not apt to make many delays, my good friend. I will give my orders at once; and an hour's sleep for myself is all that I require. Stay

you here, and return with us. I know your people are always ready."

"They are," answered Corse de Leon; "but their leader must be ready too; and I will not leave that wily beast unwatched, no, not an hour, if I can help it!"

"Should I catch him in the fact," said Brissac, "he shall have no judgment but that over the drum-head, and as high a gallows as the castle of Robeck can afford."

"What! will you hang nobility?" demanded Corse de Leon, with a grim smile. "You will have a mutiny in the army if you disallow the noble his patent to commit wrong unchastised! Fare you well, my lord; I will make your cook and your summeler to give me some refreshment, and you will find me ready when you appear."

One hour of rest was all that Brissac required; and, followed by a detachment of about a hundred and fifty men, two small pieces of artillery, and two or three of the most experienced engineers in Montmeillan, he took his way to the castle of Robeck. It still wanted several hours of daybreak when he set out, and the march was long, cold, and dreary. Nevertheless, the maréchal and his small troop threaded their way perseveringly through some of the most difficult passes of the Alps, and, about half an hour after the sun had risen, received the first intimation of their approach to the scene of contest by the roar of artillery at no very great distance.

In half an hour more they reached a high point of the road, which gave them a view into the valley where the small force of Monsieur de Thermes was drawn up. That officer had, with great skill, taken advantage of a little village, or rather hamlet, at the distance of about half a mile from the castle, adding some slight works during the night, and had brought up two pieces of cannon, which he had planted so as to defend the village against any sally made by the garrison, though the situation was not such as to enable them to play with effect upon the castle itself. It was not from these two small pieces, however, that the sounds proceeded which caught the ear of Brissac; but, on the contrary, from the guns of the castle itself, which had begun firing upon the village at daybreak, thereby showing the determination of the garrison to resist the power of France to the utmost.

The maréchal paused as soon as this scene presented

itself to his eyes, and gazed upon it with a frowning brow. "Is it possible," he muttered to himself, "that a man, nurtured in honourable feelings as Meyrand has been, can so disgrace himself? What can he hope? What can be his object?"

As he thus thought and gazed, his keen and practised eye distinguished the gleam of arms part of the way up the opposite hill, which—as the valley extended considerably at that spot, and a small plain, with the river winding through it, was spread out between the castle and the mountains on the other side—might be at the distance of about two miles.

"Who can those be?" he said, speaking to one of the officers near him; "who can those be, lying under cover of that small wood of pines close by a large building, an abbey, apparently? Our good friend the chevalier cannot have taken his men up there: he is too experienced not to know that it is from this side we must act against the castle."

"If the chevalier does not," answered the officer who was with him, "Monsieur de Thermes must know better; and there is another also, monseigneur, with Monsieur de Thermes, who knows, perhaps, better than either of them; I mean—"

"Hush, hush!" said Brissac, with a laugh. "If it be our unknown friend, who has stormed more castles in a month than any other man in Europe, we give him no name, you know. Here comes somebody from De Thermes, however; let us go slowly down and make our dispositions. Do you not think, Monsieur de Janon, that there seems a defect in the wall there, to the eastward, where, if De Thermes has any ladders with him, the thing may be done by an escalade?"

The engineer declared his opinion that it was as the maréchal said; but added, "We should need a troop of devils, indeed, my lord, to make the attempt."

"My brigands for ever!" replied Brissac, laughing. "You all wonder at my dealing with such men; you shall now see what they can do.* But go round by that path, and examine a little more closely, and then join me below."

Thus saying, he rode on to the small party which was

* I have given the exact words of Brissac, as recorded by his biographer, to account for the employment of a large body of brigands by a French marshal.

coming up from the village, and at the head of which was Monsieur de Thermes himself.

"I have not come to interfere with your command, De Thermes," said the maréchal, shaking him by the hand, "but merely to be a looker-on while you carry another of these castles. I have brought you some re-enforcements. Gentlemen," he continued, turning to the officers of the troop, "you will be so good as to recollect the Maréchal de Brissac is not here, and the general commanding is Monsieur de Thermes."

"We must do all that can be done quickly, my lord," said De Thermes, speaking in a low voice to the maréchal. "I have certain intelligence that the Spaniards are already on their march."

"We will send them back again, De Thermes—we will send them back again!" said Brissac, in a gay tone. "This country is too rough and cold for a Spaniard. But where are my friends the brigands? Surely Corse de Leon has not taken his people up to that wood under the hill?"

"He has some object in it," answered De Thermes; "for there they certainly are, and he at their head. Masseran's people set us at defiance here, and have even sent out large parties in various directions this morning, foraging all round, driving in cattle, and sweeping the hills of everything they could find. We were obliged to keep ourselves close to the village; but your friend the chevalier, as you call him, scoffed at all precautions, and galloped off with his troop, though he had not above sixty men with him, and they have at least a hundred in one body."

"You will give him some support, I suppose, De Thermes?" said Brissac.

"Now that you have brought me a re-enforcement, my lord, I will," replied De Thermes; "but it was impossible before, for these people keep us to our quarters. There are men of experience among them, evidently."

"I have heard the Count of Meyrand is there," said Brissac. "Do you think it is so?"

"I heard such a report last night," replied De Thermes; "but I did not choose to mention it, lest I should do wrong to the name of an honourable man."

A few words more of desultory conversation succeeded; and, at the suggestion of Brissac, De Thermes ordered the two sakers, or small pieces of artillery which the

maréchal had brought with him, to be placed upon an elevated spot at which they had now arrived, without descending farther into the valley. The castle, however, was so situated, that the fire of the cannon produced very little effect, and only served to draw the attention of the garrison from the village. It would seem that the besieged had not before this perceived the arrival of Brissac and the fresh troops; for, in three or four minutes after the sakers were brought into operation, a small party of horsemen was seen riding rapidly down the hill on which the castle stood, and making their way towards the monastery or abbey which Brissac had remarked, and which, it must be remembered, was skirted by a deep wood of pines, that advanced somewhat farther into the plain towards the castle.

De Thermes, now anxious to distinguish himself under the eyes of Brissac, gave rapid orders for pursuing the party, and, at the same time, directed a small re-enforcement to be sent to Corse de Leon. Before either of these orders could be executed, however, and while the maréchal and the officers who accompanied him were riding down the hill with De Thermes, their attention was caught by a volume of thick smoke issuing from the abbey; and in a moment after they thought they could perceive some flames, though at first they looked thin and pale in the broad daylight, issuing from the windows of the church.

"By Heaven, they have set fire to the building!" exclaimed Brissac. "Can any of you, gentlemen, tell what that place is?"

One of the officers who were behind rode up to reply, saying, "I heard last night, my lord, from some of the peasantry in the village, that it is an abbey of regular Cistercians, with a convent attached; but I cannot think that Monsieur de Meyrand would set fire to a religious building of that kind on purpose."

"On purpose or not," replied Brissac, "the place is on fire. But what makes you think, sir, that the Count de Meyrand is there?"

"Because I saw him, my lord," replied the officer. "They passed within three hundred yards of me this morning, when I was out reconnoitring. Some of them chased me back to the village, up to the very barriers, but not before I had seen Monsieur de Meyrand

at the head of the troop. He was in a plain buff coat, without armour, but he was evidently in command."

"You had better double your re-enforcement for Corse de Leon," said Brissac, in a whisper, to Monsieur de Thermes. "He has not enough with him to make the matter sure; and, depend upon it, he is lying in wait for the enemy as they return from the abbey. Had we more men to maintain our position here, I would venture a charge myself, to cut that fellow off from the castle."

Even while he spoke, a number of moving objects were seen around the abbey, the great bell of which could be heard tolling loudly, and in a minute or two after a troop of horsemen appeared issuing forth from among the high walls, and taking their way back towards the castle.

De Thermes multiplied his orders in haste: horses were led out, and troopers mounted without delay; and a number of the gentlemen who had followed Brissac besought and received permission to volunteer in the party destined to attack the adversary. But, ere the little body thus collected could issue forth from the village, it was clear that the enemy's troop was perceived by the men who had been lying in wait under cover of the wood. A momentary blaze of fire ran along among the dark pines; the instant after, Corse de Leon and his band were out on the plain ground; and in two minutes more, advancing with a rapid and fiery charge, his men were mingled in undistinguishable strife with the opposite party.

CHAPTER XX.

Happy would it often be for us if real life—which certainly passes away like a tale that is told—did permit, as in the telling of a tale, to go back in point of time, and bring up all the scattered incidents, in whatsoever manner we like, to bear upon and to affect the grand events of the whole. How many an omission would then be remedied! How many a vain thought would be swept away! How many a deed—small in

itself, carelessly done, but terrible in its consequences —would be cancelled and blotted out for ever! There is none, however, but that great Being who writes with the pen of Fate the history of man, who can efface one word; and his eternal justice requires that each forgiven offence shall be blotted out, even by the hand of Mercy, with the tears of Penitence and the blood of Atonement.

We must go back for a while in the course of the narrative, but we will not go back far, however. Early on the evening of the same day which saw Monsieur de Thermes appear before the castle of Robeck, a lady upon a mule, with a priest walking by her side, a girl habited as a peasant, and one stout old male attendant on foot following, approached the gate of the abbey of Saint Vial, which was even then gray with age and cumbered with thick ivy. The party were immediately admitted into the abbot's parlour, where a very aged man, dressed in the monastic habit, received them kindly.

"I come for the purpose of claiming your promise, good father," said the priest, "to give shelter and protection to this lady. I told you that I would not do so except in case of the utmost need. That case has now happened. Her place of refuge has been discovered, and I have every reason to believe that those who persecute her are even now seeking her at her late abode, while we, following a different track, have, thank Heaven! arrived here in safety."

"Here you shall have peace, my children," replied the good old man, speaking in the Italian tongue, for French he loved not to speak, though he understood it. "Rash and wild as this Lord of Masseran is, and daring in his wickedness as I believe him to be, he has never attempted, and will never attempt, to disturb this abbey in possession of its rights and privileges. It were worth his coronet to do so. I trust to you, my good brother, however," he said, speaking to Father Willand, "that it is not from the King of France that this our daughter is flying."

"Not at all in the present instance," answered Father Willand. "The lion, my good lord, seeks bigger beasts; he seldom preys upon the lamb. It is the wolf we fear; it is a certain Count of Meyrand, who—not only without the King of France's consent, but, as I am truly

informed, contrary to his express commands—is persecuting this poor child."

"I beseech you, father," said Isabel, speaking to the old man in Italian, almost as easily as in her own tongue, "I beseech you, take me under your holy and secure protection. I shall not burden you long; for good Father Willand informs me that the king's troops are already in the castle of Masseran, and will doubtless soon put an end to the persecution which I fear."

"Ah! that is sweetly spoken!" said the old man, delighted to hear his own musical language from such beautiful lips. "That is sweetly spoken, and you shall have full protection and comfort here. Not that I can keep you in the abbey," he added, "even in the visiter's apartments; for I found it needful many years ago to make a strict reform in those things. But my sister of the convent hard by—who is my sister, not spiritually alone, but of the flesh, a child of the same father—will give you refuge there, always under my protection, but still in a separate building."

Isabel thanked him warmly; and the good abbot, perhaps, might have been well pleased to detain her a little longer, to hear her musical voice speak his native tongue; but, with due regard to his character and habits, he led her away at once, and placed her under the care of persons of her own sex.

To find herself once more, as she believed, in security, was to Isabel's mind no light relief; and many pieces of news which she had heard as she came along the road had tended to renew in her bosom feelings of hope and visions of happiness, which had wellnigh been once more extinguished under the long, dull passing of heavy and expectant hours. She was now treated with kindness and with gentleness; and, after prayer and a light meal, she retired to one of the visiter's chambers, where, weary with thought and with journeying, she fell into a longer and deeper sleep than she had known for many a night. It was daylight when she woke again, and, though she knew it not, the convent bell had rung long before for early prayer. Isabel hastened her toilet in order not to be too late, without remarking that the girl who busied herself in arranging her bright dark hair looked somewhat scared and pale, and plied her labours with an unsteady hand. Sudden-

ly, in the midst, a dull, heavy roar in the distance made Isabel start and demand, "What is that?"

"It is the cannon of the castle, madam," said the girl. "They have been firing two or three times before this morning."

"Then the king's troops are before the place," said Isabel, less frightened or surprised than the girl had expected.

"Oh, yes, madam!" she answered. "One of the lay sisters has heard that the Count de Meyrand will defend it to the last."

The sound of that name turned Isabel somewhat pale, for every idea associated with it was painful and distressing to her. She dressed herself calmly, however, without any observation, and was about to go forth from the small, neat chamber which had been assigned to her, when one of the nuns came in with evident terror, saying, "Oh! my sister, do not cross the court on any account. There are armed men at the abbey gate demanding you sternly, and I saw the head and shoulders of one looking over the wall this moment; but he could get no farther, and the abbot is speaking boldly to them, and bidding them begone. Here comes some one, here comes some one. Lock the door, I beseech you, lady;" and she sprang forward to do with her own hands that which she counselled.

But Isabel stayed her gently, saying, "It is Father Willand's foot, madam, I know it well; for it has often brought me comfort and consolation during the last six months."

Almost as she spoke, Father Willand appeared, entering without ceremony, but bearing an expression of anxiety and alarm upon his countenance, which accounted for any lack of respect. "Quick, girl," he said, speaking to the attendant, "gather whatever you can together in a moment! Lady, come hither with me; throw on your veil, and come hither. The Count de Meyrand is at the great gates, threatening to force a way, and to burn the abbey if he be resisted. We may escape yet into the wood behind!"

"He will never do such a deed!" said Isabel, casting on her veil. "He is surely not wicked enough to do that!"

"He is wicked enough to do anything," replied the priest. "He is a desperate man now, lady. The check

of all earthly fear has now been taken off him, by the want of all earthly hope; and it is then that one sees what a man's wickedness really will do. The good old abbot resists him boldly, but he has no power to resist long, and our only chance is in flight by one of the doors leading into the wood behind. We may then get into the rear of the royal forces, and be safe."

As he still spoke, he hurried on, drawing Isabel after him; while the girl followed, caring little to take with her any other part of her mistress's apparel than that which she could snatch up in haste. The good priest hastened across the court, passed through the cloisters on the other side, and, opening the door by which he had entered from the abbey itself, drew Isabel with him into a quadrangle which had acquired the name of the Prior's Court. One side of it was formed by the abbey church; but, before good Father Willand could reach that building, the Count de Meyrand stood before him.

The priest would have drawn back, but Meyrand, followed by half a dozen Italian and French soldiers, darted forward and seized Isabel by the wrist with a grasp of iron. Undaunted by the danger, however, Father Willand struck him boldly on the breast, exclaiming, "Stand back, traitor, and let us pass! How dare you violate this sacred place? How dare you show yourself within the walls of this sanctuary? The curse of God be upon you, false and bloodthirsty man! Mark, all ye soldiers of France and Savoy, this man is a traitor to his king, and is by me excommunicated and anathematized for daring to profane holy ground, and break into the sanctuary of the Church. All who aid him share his treason and incur his excommunication; and I vow—"

"You shall take no more vows upon you, priest," replied Meyrand, with a bitter sneer, still holding tight the wrist of Isabel. "Take him, my men, and hang him up to one of those pinnacles. Or, stay! I have more accounts than one to settle with him. Bind him hand and foot, and throw him over a horse. We have no time for long delays here."

"What would you with me, sir?" demanded Isabel. "I beg you would free my arm; there is no need of such violence."

"What would I with you, madam?" replied the Count de Meyrand. "What would I with you? I will tell

you, lady. I would do you the honour of uniting your fate and mine together for ever. Madam, my hour is come. How long I may enjoy it, I know not; but while it is here, I will use it to the utmost. You are mine, now and for ever; and, whatever fate awaits me, depend upon it, you shall share. Nay, struggle not, lady; this grasp upon your wrist is but the symbol of the grasp I have upon you and on your fate, which, be you sure, shall never be relaxed. What smoke is that?" he continued, turning to one of the men who came out of the church, from the opening door of which burst forth a volume of dense vapour, while a roaring and crackling sound was heard from within.

"It is only the church, my lord," replied the man, laughing aloud. "You told us to set fire to the place; so we have piled up the stools and benches, and the flame has caught the carved roof already. The old sacristan would fain have stopped us, but Mark and I took him between us, and pitched him on the top of the pile."

"You fools!" exclaimed Meyrand, furiously. "It was but in the fury of the moment I said it; it was but a threat, not intended to be executed. Do you not know that every moment is precious, that we may get back to the castle, and then draw off the men before Brissac and his thousands arrive? Nay, struggle not, light girl," he continued, turning fiercely to Isabel, "or, by Heaven, I may serve you as they have done the sacristan! Think you that you can contend with me? Come on, come on there; bring the priest along; we will hang him over the gate of the castle, to give Brissac his first welcome in."

Thus saying, he caught Isabel up in his arms, passed through another door, by which he avoided the church, and was in a few minutes at the great gates of the abbey.

There, before the portal, with a number of monks around him, in no degree terrified by the fierce men opposed to him, stood the old abbot, bareheaded, and pouring forth anathemas in Italian and Latin upon some sixty or seventy men whom the Count de Meyrand had left without. Those anathemas were redoubled at the sight of the count's prisoners; but Meyrand, heeding him not, turned to listen for a moment to one of his own followers, who addressed him instantly on his coming forth.

"We must make haste, sir," he said. "Fresh troops are appearing upon the hills, and they have already opened a fire upon the castle from a place where we saw a small red cross last night."

"To horse! to horse, then!" said Meyrand; "the castle is not tenable for an hour against any considerable force. We must bring off the men and the treasure that are there, and then retreat upon the places in the rear. Here, Mark!" he continued, turning to one of those who had just come out of the church, "you are a determined devil; I may have to command as well as to fight. Take this lady up behind you, and remember your sole business is to make the best of your way to the castle. Fasten her to your belt so that she cannot escape, and, if there should seem a likelihood of her falling into the enemy's hands, hark ye!" and he whispered something to the man which made him look up in his face with an inquiring glance, saying, "What! a woman!"

"Do you hesitate?" demanded Meyrand, bending his brows upon him.

"No, no," replied the man, "I always do what I am bid when I understand it;" and, with no power to resist, Isabel, drowned in tears and as pale as death, was seated behind the trooper on his horse, and tied tightly to him by several leathern thongs. A moment more, and they were riding on at a quick pace towards the castle of Robeck, the poor girl nearly fainting at every step, yet not happy enough to fall altogether into forgetfulness of her terrible situation.

They had gone about three hundred yards, or perhaps a little more, from the gate of the abbey, and the head of the troop, which was led by the count himself, had just passed a deep wood of pines that flanked the abbey to the northward, when there came a quick, sharp report of firearms, and four or five of the foremost horsemen went down at once. The sound recalled Isabel to herself, and she looked suddenly up, when she beheld a troop of armed men coming forward at full gallop, some armed with spears, and some with drawn swords, upon the body which was bearing her away. She had not time to see anything more than that, though somewhat strangely and wildly armed, they were well prepared for an encounter of the most fierce description; horse and man bristling with various weapons, which any one

would nowadays find great difficulty in employing skilfully.

The charging horse were upon the troop of Count de Meyrand in a moment, uttering a fierce, shrill shout as they came forward; and while Meyrand strove to put his men in some order to receive them, the name of "Corse de Leon! Corse de Leon!" was repeated from trooper to trooper, seeming to fill the hearts of the count's soldiers with fear.

In another instant the two bodies met, and all was strife and confusion. Swords flashed around in every direction, and pistol shots were exchanged with the muzzles almost touching, while hand to hand, and now separated into small groups, the brigands and their opponents fought for life and death, scattered over the open space that intervened between the wood and the castle. Oh, who can tell the feelings of poor Isabel at that moment! She strove once or twice to burst the bonds that held her; but all her efforts were vain, and she had nothing to do but alternately to cover her eyes with her hands, and then glance over the scene again, and stretch out her arms towards any of the opposite party who happened to be near, while hope and fear continued their agonizing struggle in her heart.

In the mean while the man Mark, who carried her along with him, remembering the orders he had received, strove for nothing but to make himself a way on towards the castle of Robeck, still keeping some of his comrades between himself and the attacking party; or, if he crossed swords with any of them, it was but to strike a single well-directed blow and ride on. There was a horseman, however, in the troop of Corse de Leon, who seemed determined to hew a path up towards him. Armed at all points, with his beaver down, the spurs of knighthood upon his heels, his heavy sword playing like a bulrush in his hands, three times he made his way nearly up to the spot where the man Mark was hurrying on, and three times some accidental turn of the fray threw another group of the soldiery in his way.

All went down before him, however; and twice, when Isabel raised her terrified eyes and gazed in that direction, she saw, through the dust and smoke, one of the troopers of the Count de Meyrand cast headlong from his horse by a blow of his arm. The man Mark seemed especially to flee from him, as if in him he recognised

some one with whom he could not struggle; but at length, just when he was breaking away from the *mêlée* altogether, and spurring on with fury towards the castle, Isabel beheld the knight draw out from among the rest also, and gallop fiercely after. A page followed him bearing a spear; but the distance between the pursuer and the pursued, though not actually great, was considerable in such an eager race as that which they now ran. The heart of Isabel sunk with fear as she saw that the knight's charger did not gain much upon them. But, the moment after, another horseman darted from the midst of the very foremost group of combatants, where all was enveloped in a cloud of smoke and dust. He was covered with black arms from head to foot, but his horse was strong and fresh, and, bearing him on lightly, promised to overtake the other ere he could reach the castle. The man Mark measured the distance with his eye. He saw that he could not escape, and, after looking round twice at Isabel, he took the rein in his teeth, and, without quitting the hold of his sword, drew the dagger from his belt with the left hand.

She understood too well what it meant. "Oh, spare me! spare me!" cried the poor girl; but the man only muttered something between his teeth about doing what he was bid, and turned in the saddle as if the better to strike the blow. She looked round with a wild shriek for help, and, at the same moment, she saw the dark horseman behind raise a pistol in his hand, though still coming on at headlong speed. She closed her eyes, and shrunk down as low as the bonds would allow her; she heard the sharp report of firearms; the next instant she felt the form of the man to whom she was tied reel and waver in the saddle, and, overcome by terror and agitation, she lost all consciousness of what was passing around her.

When Isabel opened her eyes, she was freed from the bonds which had tied her; but the body of a dead trooper lay not far off, and two faces that she knew were gazing at her from their unclosed helmets. The one was that of Corse de Leon, the other that of Bernard de Rohan.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Most gallantly and nobly done!" exclaimed Brissac, as he witnessed the charge of Corse de Leon and his companions. "Gentlemen, spare not the spur, but see how many of the traitors you can cut off from the castle. De Thermes, would it not be better to point the guns from the village at that body which is making for the bridge?"

All was done as he directed; for his judgment and experience were too well known for De Thermes even to hesitate. The small body of French cavalry dashed after the troopers of the Count de Meyrand, the cannon were fired upon the fugitives, but still about one half of the number escaped; and Meyrand himself now showed all the soldierlike qualities which he really possessed, rallied his men, repulsed the pursuers, brought up the rear in person, and succeeded in leading the remnant of his force into the castle of Robeck.

In the mean while Brissac and De Thermes rode out of the hamlet towards the scene of the conflict, and took up their position upon a little knoll, whence they could see the flight and chase; and such is the effect of long habits of war and bloodshed upon the human mind, that two gallant and kind-hearted men stood and looked on amused at the turns and doublings of the fugitives and their fierce pursuers, though the game was for human life.

"Who are they bringing in here?" exclaimed Brissac, at length, as his eye fell upon a group of several others, bearing some one along between them. "I fear, De Thermes, it is our poor friend who has met his death in this skirmish, after so many a glorious deed. It cannot be Corse de Leon; for that is surely the chevalier mounting his horse there."

"It is a woman," said De Thermes; "don't you see her white garments, my lord?"

"Ha! the fair fugitive, for a thousand crowns!" exclaimed Brissac. "I trust she is not hurt: let us ride on and see. Would to Heaven we had but a few more men; for with this handful we can never guard against the enemy's retreat up the valley."

Thus saying, he rode slowly forward to meet the little party that was approaching, and soon found that the supposition of De Thermes and himself was right. Although Isabel, thanks to the unerring hand of Corse de Leon, which had shot the trooper through the head at the very moment that her fate seemed beyond hope, was but very slightly hurt by her fall from the horse, yet a cloak had been procured and stretched upon two spears, so as to form a sort of litter, on which some of the men were now carrying her to the village. Bernard de Rohan walked by her on foot, while his page led his charger behind; and at some little distance, giving orders to his men, and calling them once more together from the pursuit, came Corse de Leon, with his usual calm, stern countenance, passing through scenes of strife and bloodshed as tranquil and unruffled as if they formed his native element.

Brissac sprang to the ground as the little train approached; and, advancing at once to the lady's side, he said, "I hope you are not hurt, though how you came in the midst of such a scene of slaughter, fair lady, I cannot tell."

"Thank God, I am not hurt!" she replied, "farther than terror and ill-treatment could hurt me; but I hope some one will see speedily for the good Father Willand, whom that cruel man threatened to hang over the gate."

"They have carried him to the castle, lady," said Corse de Leon, who had ridden up. "But if they hurt a hair of his head, they shall rue it, as they have seldom rued anything. My lord, it is time that we should mount to the attack. There is a part of the wall crumbled down behind that little hornwork. They have not men to garnish it, and, if once carried, the castle is ours. Have you got ladders, general?"

"A few, and but a few," said De Thermes; "nor are those very good."

"They will do, they will do!" replied Corse de Leon. "If I once reach the top of the wall, they shall not easily dislodge me. Let the ladders be brought out! See! they are opening a fire upon us here. Carry the lady in!"

Bernard de Rohan had been speaking to Isabel in a low voice, and now, bending over her, he kissed her fair brow, with words of hope and promises to join her soon again. She knew where he was going; and all

the dreadful scene through which she had just passed made her but feel the more acutely that an hour, that a moment, might deprive her of him she loved for ever; but for the world she would not have stayed him, or have said one word to dim the light of courage in his eye by doubt or hesitation.

"God bless you, Bernard, and protect you!" she said; "God bless you and protect you, as he always does the good and brave!" and, covering her eyes to conceal the drops that were in them, she suffered the soldiers to bear her onward into the village.

Her lover gazed after her for a single moment, and then, casting away all thoughts but of the coming enterprise, he turned to where Brissac stood. The maréchal grasped him by the hand, but said laughingly as he pointed to his visor, "You should have had that down, my friend. However, this is a scene in which no one knows the other. Monsieur de Thermes being commander-in-chief, I am not the Maréchal de Brissac here; and you, of course, none of us are acquainted with, except as the gallant unknown leader, who has planted the standard of France upon the walls of five fortresses within the space of four-and-thirty days."

"Another half hour passed," said Corse de Leon, with a grave and meaning smile, "another half hour passed, and he shall not need to hide his face or to conceal his name from any one. Come, baron, come! Within those walls lies your fate and fortune. I told you that Corse de Leon would lead you, even with all your renown, on the path to honour; and that he, the brigand, would undo what kings have done. Here are the ladders; come, let us see which will be within that castle first. Monsieur de Brissac, wait here and judge between us, and be ready to ride in; for if he or I be, either of us, alive at the end of half an hour, the gates shall be thrown open and the drawbridge down."

"We will see," said Bernard de Rohan, laughing, "we will see. Give me a banner! Some one give me a banner!"

"Now, friends," cried Corse de Leon, turning to his followers, who, while this was passing, had sprung to the ground, and were arrayed in a close band behind him, "now, my friends, each man among us may have something to repent of: now is the time, by great deeds and good ones, to clear all away, and to cast our re-

proach upon the heads of the traitors within those walls. Follow me on, then! and if any man waver, let his neighbour put his dagger in his throat, that the world may still believe there never was a coward among us."

Thus saying, with a scaling-ladder in one hand and his drawn sword in the other, he rushed forward at the head of his men, and took his way straight to the hornwork he had mentioned; but, finding it undefended, he pushed on at once to the bastion, where, by some accident, a part of the wall had given way. There, however, the whole force of the garrison had been collected to repel the assault, and a tremendous fire was opened upon the storming party as it approached. Several men went down at once as soon as they had passed the hornwork; and Brissac and De Thermes, becoming somewhat alarmed for the result, rode on, commanding a small party of arquebusiers to advance and cover the attack.

The two generals came speedily to a spot where they could see more distinctly; and there, though that part of the wall where the assault was taking place seemed every moment but one mingled sheet of fire and smoke, they beheld the ladders firmly placed, and man after man struggling up, and hewing a path for himself amid the pikes and swords which opposed them from above. Every means was resorted to that the place supplied to repel the attack: masses of stones were cast down upon the heads of the storming-party; long pikes and hooks, which tore them from the ladders, and cast them into the fosse below, were plied among them, and everything evinced that the defence was made by men fighting with the fierceness of utter despair. But still, in the midst of all, the brigands forced their way on; and though more than one, both of the assailants and the defenders, were seen to fall headlong down through the smoke and flame, yet it soon became evident, by the progress of the waving swords and levelled pikes, that the scene of strife had moved its place, and that many of the assailants had gained the summit of the wall. Then the cloud of smoke and flame was seen to roll slowly on, as, fighting with desperate determination, the defenders were driven along the summit of the wall itself; and then took place a loud explosion, as if some magazine had blown up, or a mine had been sprung, while a dense, dark vapour rose, and covered everything from the sight.

Brissac looked at De Thermes, and De Thermes at Brissac, in silence and apprehension; but a moment after, a light wind wafted the cloud of smoke away, and standing upon a salient angle of the nearest wall appeared Bernard de Rohan, waving the standard of France above his head, as if to announce that the victory was won.

"Now, my good friends," cried Brissac, turning to the officers near him, "you see what these brigands will do when they are hearty in a cause; and let no man tell me I have done wrong in employing them. But come, there is the gate of the castle open, and, if I mistake not, Corse de Leon himself standing on the drawbridge. Let us go in, let us go in! One of you, gentlemen, ride back to the village, and tell the fair lady whom you will find there that all is safe, and the place taken."

It was with some hesitation that one of them took this task upon himself, for all were anxious to follow Brissac, who now advanced with De Thermes and the small party of arquebusiers, which had been brought forward to support the storming-party.

Corse de Leon had by this time retired from the bridge, and only one of the brigands remained stationed at the gate. The arquebusiers, however, immediately took possession of various points as they came up, and, riding on into the court, Brissac and his followers dismounted, and entered the great hall of the keep. Three wounded men were lying there; but no other person was to be seen except the page of Bernard de Rohan, who had followed his master unscathed through the struggle of the day.

"Where is your lord, my good boy?" demanded the maréchal. "You are a gallant young soldier as ever I saw, and shall not be forgotten."

"My lord, sir," replied the youth, colouring with delight, "is gone to seek for somebody with the Chevalier Lenoir."

"Is the Count de Meyrand dead or taken?" demanded Brissac.

"He has escaped by the postern, they say, sir," answered the page, "and gone with five or six others up the valley; but all the rest are killed or taken."

"Have you seen a good priest they carried off?" asked Brissac. "I hope they have not hurt our poor

friend, who has so often made us merry in court and camp, and was, besides, so true a man."

"Oh, no, sir!" replied the boy. "Father Willand I saw a minute ago, and helped to cut the thongs that tied him with my own dagger. He is in a room above, shriving one of the dying men, who was governor of the castle, they say, before the count came."

"Let us go on," said Brissac; "there is something here to be discovered yet. Corse de Leon is not a man to say aught lightly, and he promised things that I would fain see verified."

Thus speaking, he led the way through all the chambers on the ground-floor of the keep, meeting from time to time some of the captors, but not the persons that he sought. At length the sound of voices reached him and De Thermes, as they stood near the mouth of a low-browed arch, which seemed to lead down by a flight of steps into vaults and dungeons below; and, a moment or two after, Corse de Leon himself, with Bernard de Rohan and two or three others carrying torches, appeared coming up the stairs, and speaking together eagerly.

The first words that Brissac heard were from the lips of Bernard de Rohan. "It is time, my good friend," he said, "that you should tell me how and what we are seeking."

"We are seeking the only person," replied Corse de Leon, "who can at once clear you of a crime wherewith you have been charged. Let us return to that man we left dying above. I will find means to wring the fact out of him, for he must know it. Oh, my Lord de Brissac," he continued, seeing the maréchal, "you are welcome to the castle of Robeck! Let us come in here, into what they call the stone hall, and then, I beg you, hear what I have to say.

"This noble gentleman who stands before you," continued Corse de Leon, after they had entered a large paved room on the right, "has been accused by that base man to whom these castles lately belonged, of a deed of blood which he never committed. But, as men's laws were made for the purpose of torturing the innocent and securing the guilty, the accused was speedily the condemned; and they thought it great mercy that they did not put him to the rack, to make him confess an act of which he knew nothing. He would soon have been

executed had he not made his escape, by means, my lord maréchal, which it is needless to detail. Some months after all this took place, an humble person, but a man of a good heart and a stout sword, met with the Italian bravo, upon whose word, as the chief testimony, French judges condemned a French noble of unspotted name, and a French king refused him the slightest mercy. This humble friend needed no testimony but what he knew himself, to prove to him that the bravo was a murderer and a villain; and, being fond of a shorter, a more practicable, and a juster code of laws of his own than those which they teach in great cities, he proceeded at once to punish the evil doer, and to force him to confess who it was that had committed the act whereof he had accused another. To have done with circumlocution, my lord, and knowing that I can trust you, I will add, that this man Geronimo, the hired assassin and serviceable villain of the Lord of Masseran, was met by Corse de Leon one day in the woods and marshes of Chalamont; that they fought, and that the brigand would not kill his enemy, because he was resolved to wring the truth from him regarding the death of Henry of Brienne. The man was badly wounded, however, and died afterward; but before his death he acknowledged two things, that Bernard de Rohan had no hand whatever in the deed, and—Ha! Father Willand! The man above is not dead, is he?"

"There must be some one wounded near this spot," said Brissac, before the priest could answer; "for I am certain that a moment ago I heard a smothered cry, as of some one beseeching aid. Let the wounded have help, whosoever they be."

"Oh! that the foxes of the earth are dull beasts!" exclaimed Father Willand, who had entered the moment before, "and so they well may be, when the wolves have taken to lapping milk, and the lions mew like a cat. Out of my way, Bernard de Rohan—you marrier of ladies without the king's leave! You have heartily been punished for your five minutes' rebellion. Out of my way, Maréchal de Brissac; for, though your eyes were sharp enough to see that your friend was not guilty, you have not had the wit to prove that he was innocent. Out of my way, Corse de Leon; for, though you have spun a long clew as well as any old woman in the land, you have not known how to bring

it to an end; while for Father Willand, poor, despised Father Willand, with all his bones aching from being carried like a sack of wheat over the haunches of a hard-trotting horse, is reserved the great achievement of the whole! Now bring me two strong cords. See for a bottle of good wine, if there be one left in the castle, and a slice of bread fit for a hungry man."

"What is the meaning of all this?" said Brissac, somewhat sharply. "I thought I heard that cry again."

"And so you did, my most noble maréchal!" replied the priest. "But you would oblige me much by standing back from this table which you have gathered round. Now, Bernard de Rohan, thrust your dagger into the chink between that dark stone and the other, and raise it up!"

The party of gentlemen spread back at the priest's words, and, just under the table round which they were standing, there appeared a stone of about three foot square, of a somewhat darker colour than the rest, and which, when examined closely, seemed evidently separated from the others that formed the pavement. Bernard de Rohan immediately did as the priest directed, but at first the stone would not yield to all his strength. He then went to the other side, and thrust his dagger between it and the next stone, when it rose heavily up, disclosing the mouth of a sort of pit or dungeon, where not the slightest ray of light was visible. Horror seized upon all present; but that horror was increased when a voice was heard from below, exclaiming, "Oh God! have you come to help me? Have pity upon me! have pity upon me!"

"Heaven and earth!" exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, "I should know that voice!"

"Bring ropes! bring ropes, quick!" exclaimed the Maréchal de Brissac; but, without waiting for them, Bernard de Rohan cast himself down by the side of the pit, and stretched out his arm to its utmost extent, exclaiming, "Can you reach my hand?" Corse de Leon did the same on the other side; and, by an effort of their great strength, the two powerful men raised up from the bottom of the pit a pale, thin, squalid figure, clothed in garments which had once been rich, but were now reduced to noisome rags.

The moment he stood upon the firm ground, Bernard de Rohan, with wild and anxious eyes, held him at a

distance, and gazed eagerly in his face. Then exclaiming, "It is! it is!" he threw wide his arms, and Henry of Brienne sprang forward to his bosom.

Let not the reader, strange as this tale may seem, believe that it is false, for such is not the case; and all the important circumstances will be found recorded in the Life of the Maréchal de Brissac.*

"Give him some wine, give him some wine," said Father Willand, who, accustomed in the various duties of his calling to witness the effect of great emotion, knew what must be the sensations of the poor youth at that moment, and what was likely to be the result.

Before any assistance of the kind could be afforded, however, Henry of Brienne had fainted away, and it was some time before he could be brought to himself. Bernard de Rohan, the page, and the priest, tended him, while De Thermes proceeded on his military round through the castle; but Brissac, turning to Corse de Leon, exclaimed, "This is a new miracle of your working, indeed, my good friend! You were going to tell us of another acknowledgment, however, which the man you so justly punished made before his death. Was it of the fact which we behold here?"

"Not so, not so," replied Corse de Leon. "No; he acknowledged that Bernard de Rohan had no hand in the deed, and, moreover, he told me that here I should find one who would explain all and clear up all. He spoke confusedly aud hurriedly, for the confession he made was at the point of death; but the other acknowledgment I spoke of was, that the body of the man which was found in the forest was not that of the Count of Brienne, but that of his servant, who had been killed in defence of his master. I had some vague hope that it might be as it has proved; for the man Geronimo stoutly denied, even to his last gasp, that he had killed the young count. See, my lord, however—see! he revives, and he himself will tell you more."

Henry of Brienne, however, had but little to tell. Wine and food soon gave him back some degree of

* By the important circumstances, I mean the supposed murder, the trial of the friend, the confession of the servant under the torture, and the ultimate discovery of the man believed to be murdered, in one of the castles of the Lord of Masseran, in a loathsome dungeon, concealed by one of the stones of the pavement, with many other minute particulars mentioned in these pages.

strength, and then, while all who were present crowded round him, he related exactly what had happened between him and Bernard de Rohan, as his friend himself had told it.

"I was foolish," he said, addressing himself to the young cavalier: "I was mad, I believe. But the cause of my whole conduct was, that I had solemnly pledged myself to separate you and Isabel from each other. I knew not how to do it. I was confused and embarrassed; and, as so often has happened to me before, I acted wildly, rashly, and wrongly, in seeking to free myself from a situation of difficulty in which I did not know how to behave. The thing of all others I sought to avoid was, that you and I together should come up with my sister; and yet, not knowing to what difficulties she might be exposed, I did not choose either to abandon the search, or ask you to abandon it. Angry with myself and everything else, I determined to drive you from me, and your perseverance in accompanying me only served to irritate and drive me nearly wild. How I behaved, you know, alas! too well; but after you were gone I forded the stream, and rode some way on towards Bourg, till, recollecting that I had left my servant behind, and that I expected messengers from that villain of Masseran, I turned back again towards Nantua, after sleeping at a cottage on that side of the river; but I met those I sought, on their way to overtake me, at a village some fifteen or sixteen miles behind. This was the day after we had parted; and I found that the messengers which the Lord of Masseran had sent were three in number, headed by the man Geronimo, who told me, with great affected concern, that he had been much alarmed on my account, for that at Ceyserat he had heard of your passing alone. He had sought in the forest, he said, and found marks of blood, but had come on to seek me. As he bore me fresh instructions—apparently from the king himself—to prevent Isabel from holding any communication with you whatsoever, I explained to him the circumstances which had caused us to part, and the quarrel between us. Whether he had been before instructed to carry me off, or whether the diabolical plot then entered into his head, I know not, but he urged me strongly to set out, accompanied by him and the rest, in order to overtake you before you discovered the farther course of Isabel, who, we had reason to believe, had

left the straight road to Macon. He persuaded me that, by crossing the forest and taking the ford, I should save a considerable distance; but, while I was riding along that same sandy road down which you followed me, talking to him of the state in which he had left matters in Paris, he suddenly sprang upon me, and, before I could defend myself or make even a preparation for resistance, I was pulled from my horse, tied hand and foot, and gagged so that I could not utter a sound. While this was taking place, the poor fellow who accompanied me had drawn his sword and nearly overcome one of the traitors; the others, however, turned upon him the moment I was secured, and I had the horror of seeing him butchered before my face. They then stripped him of his own garments, and clothed him in a suit of mine which they found in the valise upon his horse, and I easily divined that their purpose was to make the world believe that I was dead, as doubtless they have since done. Two of them dragged the body away, leaving me under the guard of the third, and did not return for near an hour; after which they carried me, too, into one of the deepest parts of the wood, and there kept me till after night had fallen. I was then placed on horseback, and tied on, and, after a long night's journey, found myself in Savoy. The following day was passed upon the mountain side; but one of them went to some town or village and procured food, and in the middle of the next night I was brought hither. That dungeon has been my abode ever since. The air is admitted to it by a small hole cut through the solid rock, and food was let down to me by a thin string and a hook once every night. Why he did not kill me I cannot tell; and, strange to say, notwithstanding the horrible state in which I was kept, I did not seek or wish for death. I always had a hope—I may almost call it an expectation—that my fate would undergo a change; and even from the very depth of the misery in which I was plunged, this hope received light. I thought it was impossible that the good God could leave me always so, however wrongly I might have behaved to him who had been the friend of my youth."

"And that friend, my good young gentleman," said the Maréchal de Brissac, "has since then been accused of your murder, tried, and condemned; has made his escape from prison; and has from that moment been

here in exile, serving his country at the very time he was most unjustly treated. Your sister is also a fugitive, but she is luckily safe in the village below; and you may now have the happiness of removing for ever the stain from your friend's honour, and of conferring upon him, I trust, as many blessings as he has lately endured miseries."

CHAPTER XXII.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the day on which the castle of Robeck was taken, that, as Bernard de Rohan was sitting beside Isabel de Brienne, with her right hand clasped in his, and her left resting in that of her brother, the Maréchal de Brissac entered the small cottage room where they sat with a brow not only grave and thoughtful, but even sad. He was followed by a gentleman of a somewhat stern mien, and by two or three attendants unarmed, who seemed, by the dusty state of their apparel, to have journeyed far that day.

"My dear De Rohan," said Brissac, as he entered, "it is, I believe, destined in this world that no day of happiness and success should ever end without a touch of bitterness, and such, I am afraid, is to be the case with you, although the bitterness will be very light in comparison with the sweetness of this day. I know not whether you are acquainted with Monsieur de Nansé; but, I am sorry to say, he comes to seek you on the part of the king, who has heard of your place of refuge, and has commanded this gentleman to carry you a prisoner to Paris."

"It is only happy, sir," said Bernard de Rohan, addressing De Nansé, who was an officer of Henry's guard, "it is only happy that you arrived not a day sooner, or I might have been prevented thereby from discovering the incontestable proofs of my innocence of the crime with which I have been charged."

"It is happy, sir," answered De Nansé, stiffly; "for I was ordered by the king, notwithstanding the services

which we are told you have rendered here, to bring you to Paris in chains."

The colour rose in Bernard de Rohan's cheek: "That was somewhat harsh," he said; "and, although I have certainly been condemned for the death of a man still living, which was strange enough, I might still have been surprised to be brought to Paris in chains for an act that had never been committed. This, sir," he continued, somewhat provoked at the cold and bitter aspect of De Nansé, "this, sir, is Henry, count de Brienne, whom I murdered, according to the decree of various wise men sitting at the Châtelet."

"I have the honour of recollecting Monsieur de Brienne well," replied De Nansé, "and the sight of his person here will dispense with the necessity of my putting you in chains, but not of my carrying you to Paris, sir. There are other matters which the king may have to inquire into. One of the charges mentioned to me was having drawn your sword within the royal precincts. The king visited that offence severely upon my poor cousin of Meyrand, and, by driving him to despair, doubtless cast him into rebellion. He is not likely, therefore, to pass over the act in you."

"I had forgotten," replied Bernard de Rohan, "your near connexion with Monsieur de Meyrand. The king's pleasure, however, sir, must be obeyed, and shall be obeyed by me without more words, for I trust to be able fully to justify myself; and, as the event has proved that I was guiltless of one charge, I doubt not I shall be believed when I assert that I am innocent of the other. Dearest Isabel," he continued, "I fear that we must part."

"Yes, Bernard," she replied, with a smile struggling through the tears which had gathered in her eyes, "but now we part in good hope; when we last parted, it was in despair."

"Whatever be your own ultimate fate, sir," said De Nansé, in a tone somewhat softened, "whatever be your own ultimate fate, the lady will not be far separated from you at present, though separated she must be. The king is aware of her having taken refuge on the borders of France and Savoy, and my orders are to bring her to Paris also; you as rapidly as possible, leaving the lady under the charge of some of my attendants, to follow with such speed as may suit her convenience."

While all this passed, Henry of Brienne had remained silent, and Brissac stood gnawing his lip with evident mortification; but when his sister was mentioned, the young count started up, his pale face glowing somewhat angrily, while he exclaimed, "My sister shall come to Paris, but not under the charge of any of your attendants, while her brother has an arm to protect her, and a right to guide and guard her."

De Nansé gazed at him for a moment with a calm, supercilious air, and then turning to Brissac, he said, "You know the king's orders, Monsieur de Brissac, and I must look to you for the means of enforcing them."

Henry of Brienne was about to burst forth with his usual wild and somewhat uncontrollable vehemence; but Brissac interposed, saying, "Monsieur de Nansé, the king, when he gave the orders which you mention, was totally unaware of the extraordinary change of circumstances which has taken place this day. He knew not that Monsieur de Rohan, by one accidental discovery, would be totally freed from every imputation which has been cast upon him; and that—as the other charge made against him was founded upon the evidence of those persons who brought the false and iniquitous accusation from which he is now freed—it is probable that charge was as false and iniquitous as the other. Neither did the king know, sir, that the brother of Mademoiselle de Brienne was alive, present, and willing to conduct her himself to his majesty's court; therefore—"

"But it is necessary, sir," said De Nansé, sharply, "and I insist that—"

"Do not knit your brows at me, sir," said the Maréchal de Brissac, "and do not presume to use the word insist within my government. I will surrender Monsieur de Rohan into your hands upon the condition, and with the understanding, that you carry him to the king's presence with all gentlemanly courtesy and attention, recollecting that the only real and substantial cause of your being sent hither upon such a mission is now removed. In regard to Mademoiselle de Brienne, if my young friend, her brother here, undertakes to escort her to the king's presence with all convenient speed, his majesty's commands will be obeyed with sufficient accuracy."

"Well, sir, well," said De Nansé, "if you choose to take the responsibility of these things upon yourself, the consequences be upon your own head."

"Be they so, sir," replied Brissac; "I have not, in general, shrunk from responsibility: and, moreover, I shall take upon myself to fix the time of departure, which shall be to-morrow morning. Monsieur de Rohan may well be considered too much fatigued to-night, by great exertions in the service of the king, to undertake the journey without repose. Bernard," he continued, turning to De Rohan, "you must consider yourself in my custody for the present, as I make myself your godfather, and answer for your appearance. I must now go to send off a trumpet towards the Milanese frontier, announcing the signature of peace and the cessation of hostilities on all parts. At the same time, I shall demand that the Count de Meyrand be given up to France as a traitor and a rebel; and perhaps he may have more difficulty in justifying himself than those whom he has accused. Monsieur de Nansé, you will do me the honour of supping with me at the quarters of Monsieur de Thermes; De Rohan, I shall expect to see you there for an hour before bedtime." Thus saying, he made room for Monsieur de Nansé to pass out before him, and left the little party together, as he had found them.

An hour or two passed over—notwithstanding the somewhat painful interruption which had taken place—in tranquil happiness, such as Bernard and Isabel had not known for many years. They neither of them would believe for a moment that there was any farther ill in store for them, or that the charge in regard to a violation of the precincts of the royal residence would not vanish away like an idle vapour. The events of that day had been so bright and happy altogether—the restoration of Henry of Brienne, as it seemed, from the very grave; the clearing of Bernard de Rohan's name from every stain; the delivery of Isabel herself from the persecution of the Lord de Masseran and the Count de Meyrand—all had the natural effect of inspiring hope, with visions of happiness which seemed almost prophetical. It had been like one of those bright and golden summer days, which we cannot see go down in splendour and majesty without anticipating a clear and glowing morrow, though there be a cloud or two upon the edge of the western sky.

At length, as the hour of repose approached, Bernard de Rohan prepared to depart. He pressed Isabel fondly

to his heart. He gazed for a moment with a sigh, and yet a smile too, on the ring which she still bore upon her finger; the ring which he had placed there at the altar now nearly a year before; but his heart was firm and true, and, raising that hand to his lips, he kissed it tenderly and devotedly, and left her.

When he arrived at the house where Brissac had taken up his quarters with De Thermes, he found that the maréchal had quitted the supper-table, at which the others, after the fashion of soldiers, were still revelling in honour of their success. The maréchal was in another room, but not alone; for seated beside him was good Father Willand, who was in the act of telling him how he had discovered, from the dying words of De Masseran's officer in the castle of Robeck, the place in which Henry de Brienne was confined.

Their previous conversation, however, had turned upon other things; and, the moment the young cavalier entered, Brissac renewed the subject.

"I have wished to consult with you, De Rohan," he said, "before you go, for this treaty of peace places me in many respects in a situation of embarrassment. In regard to your own fate, De Rohan, though that sour and evil spirit in De Nansé and the rest of the powerful relations of Meyrand may give you some annoyance, yet I look upon your happiness as quite secure. There is a good friend of ours, however, to whom I am not ashamed to say that I owe much, with whom this peace must place me in a difficult and painful situation. You will easily understand that I mean Corse de Leon. When I first came into Piedmont, I had made a resolution of exterminating all the various bands of brigands which were scattered over the country, and you may remember that I executed many. This determination was more especially taken in regard to the troop of the famous Corse de Leon, then consisting of more than two hundred men. He set all my measures at defiance, however, while I easily got hold of inferior leaders. As I did so, I gradually discovered that many of these bands consisted of men driven to despair by the tyranny and oppression of their petty Italian lords, and I gradually fell upon the plan of offering them their choice between death and regular service under me.. In the mean time, I every day heard more and more of this extraordinary man, of his generosity, his daring, his wisdom, and even

his humanity and kindness. I heard of peasants and humble citizens protected, supported, and relieved. I heard of base plans and iniquitous schemes frustrated in the most marvellous manner. I heard, indeed, of signal and somewhat barbarous acts of vengeance upon oppressors, extortioners, and evil doers, while, at the same time, I had myself indubitable proofs of skill and talent, such as are rarely met with. Thus I adopted gradually very different views with regard to Corse de Leon. I acted, perhaps, somewhat rashly in the business, cast myself almost entirely into his power, but succeeded in making him a friend, and have since, from his aid, derived infinite benefit to the cause of France. How then am I to deal with him now? I must not suffer him, if I remain in command here—I must not suffer him, I say, to carry on the system in which I found him engaged; but, at the same time, I cannot show myself so ungrateful to him as to cast him off the moment his services are no longer needful to me. Father Willand here," he continued, "advises me to offer him some high command in the army under me, and I would stretch my authority to the very utmost so to gratify him. What think you, De Rohan?"

"I fear, my lord," replied the young cavalier, "I fear that he will not accept it. But your only way is to see him yourself, and to speak to him frankly and boldly, as you always do. At all events, he will understand and appreciate your conduct, and perhaps point out himself some means of freeing you from your present embarrassment. When are you likely to see him?"

"Immediately," replied De Brissac. "He promised to visit me here this night; but stay you with me, both of you, and let us all try to persuade him to what is right."

"Ay, maréchal!" answered the priest; "but recollect that there are many sorts of right in this world. What is right for the lion is not right for the lamb. You do not put a bottle of Avignon claret into an earthen pitcher.* What suits Brissac wo'n't suit Corse de Leon. So don't make up your mind, as most men do, to think everybody in the wrong that is not pleased with what pleases you."

Some farther conversation took place, but no new

* The first wine that I find called claret is the wine of Avignon, very different from that to which we now give the name.

suggestion was elicited; and in about a quarter of an hour, Corse de Leon himself entered the room unannounced, and placed himself standing at the end of the table opposite Brissac. His countenance was mournful and somewhat stern; and Brissac, feeling that he had an ungrateful task to perform, laid aside the usual ceremony which he maintained as governor of Piedmont, and, going round, shook the brigand by the hand.

Corse de Leon gazed in his countenance with a meaning smile. "I have heard the news, my lord!" he said. "Peace is signed! A peace as disgraceful to France as it is advantageous to our enemies, and especially to the great tyrant of the day, Philip of Spain. I have heard the news! I have heard the news! And now, my lord, to make the way easy for you, I will speak upon one of the subjects which embarrass you in this matter. There must be many that both embarrass and grieve you, or I don't know the Maréchal de Brissac. But to the matter in hand. Peace is signed! and you do not know what to do with Corse de Leon! The very hesitation does you honour, my lord. There is scarcely any other general in Europe who would not bring his provost, with half a dozen arquebusiers, to the back of that door, and have out the brigand in the churchyard, and shoot him within half an hour."

"Nay, nay!" answered Brissac, laughing, "I would rather be shot myself, my good friend; but you have touched upon my embarrassment. You know that in this government of Savoy I must maintain an established order now that peace is restored. In the mean time, I scruple not to acknowledge before these two, as I would before the whole world, that in the latter wars of Piedmont you have served me nobly, generously, and bravely. I would fain recover you from this wild and wandering life which you pursue, and, at the same time, offer you that high distinction and rank which you merit. Doubtless we shall have to maintain a very strict and careful watch upon the frontier of the Milanese, especially towards the mountains; and, if you will consent, you shall have the command of that district, together with two of what are called the New Bands, and a couple of companies of pikes. You will form your own men into another company, and, having the formal, authorized command of the whole, will be under the orders of no one but myself."

The brigand smiled, not exactly contemptuously, but certainly with a look of amusement, at the very proposal. "What, Monsieur de Brissac!" he said, "Corse de Leon a colonel of *gens d'armes?* Oh! my good lord, that were a miracle indeed! which would make the fishes of Como raise their heads out of the water to see it more merrily than they did to hear the preaching of Saint Anthony of Padua. No, my good lord! No! When you train the chamois of the mountains to draw farmers' carts, then you may hope to see Corse de Leon manœuvring his men at a *montre*."

"But what then can I do for you?" said Brissac. "Name it, my good friend! name it! I ask you, as a new service and a new favour, after many, to deliver me from the difficulty in which I am placed regarding you."

"My lord, you are a noble gentleman!" replied Corse de Leon, warmly, "and I thank you for making me think well of at least one man in high station; but it is not I who will deliver you from the difficulty in which you are placed. Time will do it—ay, and very speedily! With all your knowledge of courts, you are deceived as to your future situation. You will not long have any difficulty with the affairs of Piedmont at all, nor those of Corse de Leon either."

"How so? how so?" demanded Brissac. "Have you any news from Paris?"

"More certain than you have, my lord," replied Corse de Leon. "You only know that peace is signed. I have to tell you that Savoy and Piedmont are to be restored to the duke, together with Corsica and all that you have gained upon the side of the Milanese. Five towns alone are to be retained for France, merely as security for the execution of the treaty."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Brissac, starting up, "I will resist for the honour of my country, and with my own hand carry on the war. I and my soldiers in this are one. Let the King of France, if he have signed this act, put us to the ban as rebels, so that he may not himself be compromised by our deeds; but let me maintain the glory of my country, and hold for her those territories which we have won for her with our blood."*

* These are the very words afterward addressed by Brissac to the King of France himself.

"If such be your determination, my lord," replied Corse de Leon, "and if you so act, I will be your soldier too; so then the difficulty will be at an end."

"That is to say," cried the priest, laughing, "there is only one trade he can choose if prevented from being a brigand, which is that of a rebel. No, no! my good Lord of Brissac, if it were not for many another consideration, you would never set the example of opposing the will of your sovereign, nor show one more great and noble man in arms against legitimate authority."

Brissac bowed his head upon his hands and sat silent, while Corse de Leon added, "I have told you what I know, my lord; there is much more, of which I am as sure as if I had seen it. They will disband your troops. They will take from you your government. They will leave your soldiers to follow Corse de Leon, and yourself without reward or recompense. I repeat again, that such is the baseness of courts and statesmen, that your gallant troops, ere three months be over, will be brigands among these mountains."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Brissac, vehemently. "That they will never be."

"Where will they find bread?" demanded Corse de Leon. "I know the intention is gone forth to disband them. Where will they find bread?"

"In my house," replied Brissac, "as long as I am alive and have it to share with them. But, my good friend," he added, more calmly, "I will not doubt that what you have told me is true; and if it be so, the difficulty is removed from me. I will never treat as an enemy the man who has fought by my side as a friend; but if Piedmont be given up to the Duke of Savoy, with the Duke of Savoy will you have to deal."

"And with the Duke of Savoy I will deal!" replied Corse de Leon, significantly. "In the mean time, I will betake myself to the mountains, beyond the range of your command. I have some traffic to carry on with one or two good lords in the Milanese. There was one of them—last Saturday was ten days—flogged a poor peasant lad to death for defending the honour of his bride and striking the keeper of the toll upon the river. He forgot there was such a man as Corse de Leon, and I must call it to his mind. With this and other things somewhat like it, I shall have good occupation for my

time till you, my lord, are gone; so you need not be uneasy about me."

"Nay, but I still am," replied Brissac; "I would fain give you some token of my gratitude. I would fain, too, see you devote your vast courage and the great powers of your mind to some more noble, great, and expansive things than those which now occupy you."

"Oh, let me join my voice too!" said Bernard de Rohan. "You have been my friend, my companion, my deliverer! Make me, oh make me proud of the man to whom I owe such benefits! and, instead of glorying in pursuits which have become but too odious by the deeds of others, carrying your strong arm, your noble heart, and your powerful mind to the achievement of some great undertaking, to the support of some noble cause! Is not the infidel, even now, preparing to attack the last Christian bulwark in the Mediterranean?"

"You forget," replied Corse de Leon, with a curling lip, "that the blood which flows in these veins is not noble; that I cannot, that I must not show myself among the brethren of Saint John but as a servitor. No, no!" he added, crossing his arms upon his broad chest; "for a while longer I will live as I have lived; but I see things gathering far in the North which will end in a tempest fit for me to move in. I see, too, under those dark clouds, the dawning of a light which shall bring forth a new day upon the world. I see the time coming when the Spanish tyrant shall bow before the indignant vigour of a roused-up nation. I see, not far off, the time when an oppressed people shall break the chains that bind them, and call to the free and generous hearts of every land for aid, encouragement, and support. When that time comes, my friends—and I dare to call you so—you may perchance see Corse de Leon with another name, winning honour in the way that you would have him!"

Thus saying, he turned and left them, and was heard of no more in Savoy till his prophecy was accomplished in the shameful abandonment of Brissac and his soldiers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Although Monsieur de Nansé had received distinct orders to hasten his return to Paris with Bernard de Rohan, several weeks elapsed ere the journey was accomplished; and every excuse which human ingenuity could devise was resorted to with a view to delay their arrival in the capital. Now the chancellor directed the captain of the king's guard to wait at Fontainebleau for farther orders. Now the king was said to be at Villers-Coterets, and it was necessary to send thither to know whether the prisoner should be brought there or not: then news arrived that the royal party had left that place, and a new delay occurred to give time for inquiry as to where it had gone.

The secret of all this was, that the friends of the Count de Meyrand, and the many noble families with whom he was connected, were using every endeavour to obtain a pardon for his past conduct, and to prejudice the mind of the king against one whom they justly considered as his enemy. They feared that these schemes and purposes would be overthrown by the coming of Bernard de Rohan to Paris; and in Monsiéur de Nansé they found a willing instrument in keeping him away from the capital.

At length, however, Bernard de Rohan would no longer be trifled with. There was no pretence now either for keeping from him his attendants or debarring him from communication with his friends; and he found that Isabel herself had reached Paris before him. In the letter by which she informed him of this fact, she told him that the king himself was in the capital, and had been so for some time; that she had not been admitted to his presence, however; and that she feared there were many intrigues taking place in order to influence the royal mind.

The moment that he received this letter, Bernard de Rohan sat down and addressed the king himself in writing, demanding to be admitted to his presence, and informing him that he had been detained for several weeks, unwillingly and unreasonably, at a distance

from the court. As soon as Monsieur de Nansé appeared, the young nobleman notified to him what he had done; but the captain of the guard, now driven from all evasion, informed him that it was his intention to carry him immediately to Paris.

"In the first place, however, Monsieur de Rohan," he continued, endeavouring to bend his features into a persuasive smile which was not at all natural to them, "in the first place, Monsieur de Rohan, I have a proposal to make to you on behalf of the friends and family of Monsieur de Meyrand, which, as a generous and kind-hearted gentleman, you will, I am sure, consent to. It is merely this: the whole of that family—and you must know how influential it is—will join their voice to yours in beseeching the king to sanction at once your marriage with Mademoiselle de Brienne, provided that you not only abstain from saying anything to inculpate farther my cousin Adrian, but do also yourself petition his majesty to grant him a pardon for the past, and suffer him to return to France."

Bernard de Rohan gazed upon him with indignation, and replied at once, "Monsieur de Nansé, if you had not proposed to me this matter in the terms of a negotiation, I might have been tempted, at your solicitation, to do all that I could in favour of Monsieur de Meyrand; but by holding out to me, as an inducement, your interest to obtain the hand of Mademoiselle de Brienne—to which I have an undoubted right, and with the disposal of which you have nothing to do whatever—you prevent me from saying one word in support of the object you desire. I will hear no more upon the subject, sir. The hand of Isabel de Brienne is not a bribe which you can dispose of at your pleasure."

"Very well, baron! very well!" replied De Nansé, with a bitter smile. "You may have forgotten his majesty swore by his honour and his life, that, so long as he wore the crown, you should never wed the lady, if you drew your sword upon the Count de Meyrand. The king may have forgotten it too; but he shall soon be made to remember it if you continue in the resolution which you have expressed."

"I shall not change it," replied De Rohan, firmly; but, at the same time, the words of his companion created some unpleasant feelings of apprehension in regard to the view which Henry might take of his oath.

On the next day, towards noon, a packet arrived, the contents of which caused Monsieur de Nansé's brows to contract heavily. Orders were immediately given, however, for saddling horses, and for preparing to proceed to the capital; and, ere night, Bernard de Rohan, with such attendants as he had now gathered round him, the king's officer, and a small party of guards, were once more on their way towards Paris. They did not go far, however, that evening, as Monsieur de Nansé had still a courier to send off, in order that his friends might fully prepare the way for what was no longer avoidable—an interview between Bernard de Rohan and the king himself.

It was in the evening of a bright summer's day that Bernard de Rohan once more entered the capital of his native country; and the aspect of the gay and cheerful metropolis of a gay and cheerful people seemed to offer to his eyes a more lively and bustling scene than it had ever before presented; more living beings moving, thronging, singing, talking, in streets, in doorways, in shops, and at windows, than he had ever before beheld.

This was not only in the seeming, but perhaps it was true; for those days were days of peculiar merriment and splendour in the French capital. The nation was rejoicing at the newly-recovered peace, and cared not what had been paid for it. The royal espousals of Philip of Spain to the unfortunate Elizabeth, and of the Duke of Savoy to another princess of France, gave new interest to the times; and the magnificent and chivalrous monarch who then sat upon the French throne showed a resolution to lead the way in all pageantry and revelry, and to keep up as long as possible the gladness and rejoicings of his people.

Such was the moment at which Bernard de Rohan and his companions rode through the long street of houses, gardens, churches, and monasteries which then led through the suburb towards that gate of the city known by the name of the Porte Saint Antoine. Every house had its decoration and its sign of festival; garlands were hanging over the doorposts, tapestries and silks spread out from the windows; the very convents and abbeys looked gay, and the bells in all the quarters of the town were ringing gayly. When the gate had been passed, however, and the dark towers of the Bastile left behind, an obstacle presented itself to the far-

ther course of the horsemen in the shape of great barriers of wood drawn nearly across the street.

The party of travellers paused to examine what was the cause of this precaution, and saw an immense number of workmen busily engaged in marking out the centre of the street with posts and palings, covering them with silks and tapestries, and branches of laurels and other evergreens entwined; while at a distance appeared a high-raised platform, with a canopy ornamented with crimson and gold, and bearing embroidered upon the hangings a thousand fanciful devices, alluding in quaint ways to the restoration of peace, and to the friendly union of France, Spain, and Savoy.

At one side of this enclosed space, which formed, in fact, the lists for the approaching tournament, a sufficient space was left for two horsemen to ride abreast; and along this narrow alley Bernard de Rohan and his companions took their way, among crowds of people on foot assembled to witness the preparations, who greeted them with laughter and good-humoured jests, and vowed that they were knights come to break a lance in the sports of the succeeding days.

Making their way slowly onward, they at length approached the royal palace, called in those days the Tournelles, the king having given up his other dwelling at the Louvre to the ambassadors from Spain, and various princely personages who had lately arrived, together with a splendid train of full five hundred gentlemen of the first distinction.

The old palace of the Tournelles, which has now been demolished nearly two centuries and a half, was an immense and magnificent pile of Gothic building, nearly surrounded by magnificent gardens, occupying a large space in the city of Paris, very nearly opposite the well-known hotel of Saint Paul, at the side of the Rue Saint Antoine. The whole of the Place Royale, and a vast number of the streets surrounding it—spots which themselves have since become famous in the ancient history of Paris—were then either covered with the vast buildings of the Tournelles, or enclosed within the walls of its gardens. Externally it presented an immense mass of gray stone masonry, studded with a multitude of windows, and flanked at very short intervals by a number of small tall towers, each also full of windows and loopholes.

Such was the general aspect of the place; but the face of the building, which was usually somewhat stern and harsh, though majestic enough, was on the present occasion enlivened in an extraordinary manner by the flags, pennons, and banners that fluttered from every tower, and by the gay shields of arms which were suspended from the various windows.

Quite enough of the chivalrous spirit of the day existed in the bosom of Bernard de Rohan to make his heart beat high at the sight of such preparations, and a longing seized upon him to take a part in the exercises about to be performed. He well knew that few who would there appear were at all competent to meet him lance to lance, and he hoped, at all events, to obtain permission to share in what was to take place; but bitter disappointment, alas! awaited him. Monsieur de Nansé, according to the commands he had received, rode at once to the gates of the Tournelles, and caused his arrival to be reported to the king. Half an hour of expectation succeeded; and then that officer and his prisoner were summoned to the presence of Henry, who rceceived them alone, but with a frowning brow.

"Monsieur de Nansé," he said, "at the best, your conduct has been very unwise and ill-judged. I trust that there is no reason for me to believe that these delays have been intentional."

The officer of the guard excused himself as best he might; but Henry, who was evidently in haste, soon interrupted him, waving his hand and saying, "Enough, enough! sir. Monsieur de Rohan, it is to you that I have principally to speak."

Bernard de Rohan thought the king's tone and manner was softened when he had turned to address him; and, advancing gracefully, he bent the knee and kissed his sovereign's hand, saying, "I trust, sire, that I have your pardon for flying from the arm of the law, when I knew most perfectly my own innocence, and the impossibility of proving it."

"Sir, I thank you for so doing," replied the king, "for thereby you have spared me many a bitter regret. I have seen this morning the young Count de Brienne, and have heard all that he has to say. Your innocence and truth are beyond all doubt; and I have also to thank you for many services since rendered to my crown in Savoy. Most willing shall I be to show my gratitude

to you, and to make you full reparation for what you have suffered, in such manner as a king may wisely and honourably do. But, alas! sir, there is one point in which I must still give you pain, and refuse you, probably, the boon that you are most anxious to demand. Hear me out! for I say this to prevent all needless application. In regard to your marriage with Mademoiselle de Brienne, I have taken an oath, such as no power on earth shall ever induce me to break. That you drew your sword upon the Count de Meyrand is incontestably proved; that you drew it the first is asserted—"

"But, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I may now, I know, appeal to one who probably can satisfy your majesty."

"You mean the dauphin," said the king. "Long ago, Monsieur de Rohan, he acted as became my son, and informed me of the whole particulars; but, when pressed to the minute facts, he acknowledged that he could not say which first drew upon the other, having his back turned at the commencement of the affray."

Bernard de Rohan's head drooped, and he replied not a word. "I grieve for you, my friend," continued Henry, "I grieve for you much. I grieve for myself, that I am compelled to make one of my most noble and faithful subjects wish for my death! But to show you that I would not for worlds take any unjust means to change such a wish, I have this day solemnly promised Mademoiselle de Brienne that she shall never be pressed either to choose another husband or to take the veil."

Still Bernard de Rohan replied not, but stood before the king as if grief had turned him into stone. Henry, however, rose, adding, "Another day, De Rohan, you shall tell me what boon I can bestow upon you, but on this subject you must never touch more. On this subject I am as inexorable as the grave."

Bernard de Rohan raised his head sadly but firmly: "Sire," he said, "whatever be your decision, may you live long for the happiness and the blessing of your subjects! and may I be the only person among your people who can accuse you of injustice! In a former instance, when I was wrongfully condemned, you were, as you say you now will be, inexorable to me. My truth and honour have since been fully re-established, beyond the possibility of doubt; and by that truth and honour I

pledge myself that this last only remaining accusation against me is as false as the other: an accusation made by the darkest of criminals, and abetted by a convicted traitor. You do not indeed take from me life in this case, but you take from me hopes that I value more than life; and I must add, that if I have served your majesty—and to do so faithfully has always been my purpose—bitter have been the fruits of that service, and lamentable to me the result."

Henry's cheek had grown very red; and though he made an effort to govern his anger, yet it so seldom happens that the words of truth come straightforward upon a royal ear, that the reproach which burst from the agonized heart of Bernard de Rohan—however well deserved, and however much called for by the very act he was committing—seemed to the monarch the most daring insolence.

"Leave my presence, sir!" he said, "leave my presence! I esteem your services, regret your late sufferings, and pity your present disappointment sufficiently to forgive you the language you have used. But I must not suffer you to speak farther, lest grief should cause you to say things I cannot forgive. Leave me, sir! I say, and without reply. You are free to come and go, whither you will; and I will take care that full justice be done in reversing the sentence which was mistakenly pronounced against you."

Bernard de Rohan bowed his head and withdrew. As he passed out of the palace, the preparations for the tournament again met his eye; but they now fell upon his sight as a matter in which he had no interest, as one of the many idle occupations of a world which had lost to him all zest and all attraction. For the time, hope, the light of life, was extinguished, and all was gray darkness in the same scenes which before had presented nothing but beauty and splendour.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was the bright morning of a June day. The whole merry world of Paris turned out to display their holyday dresses on scaffoldings covered with every rich

cloth and ornamented with every fanciful device. Beauty and brightness shone around; and all that was gay, and witty, and splendid in a nation famous for gayety, wit, and splendour, was collected to witness that pageant which was intended to be the last splendid festival in honour of the marriage of Elizabeth of France with Philip of Spain, but which was destined, in reality, to be the last tournament held in Europe. Every spot which was not occupied by the high princes and nobles was crowded by the populace of the capital; and though some discontent had been occasioned during the preceding days by the arrest of various distinguished Protestants, yet the people were now in high good-humour, the more especially as the French knights had decidedly the advantage of the foreigners in those military exercises wherein all nations of Europe at that time took a pride.

At the head of the six challengers whose shields ornamented the eastern end of the lists, was Henry the Second of France himself, who was still one of the most eminent of his court for all such sports and pastimes. The Maréchal de Vieilleville was another; but as it is not necessary here—after the manifold descriptions of tournaments and passes of arms that have been given elsewhere, and especially that surpassing description of the field of Ashby de la Zouch, which proceeded from the great master's pen—to dwell upon the manifold encounters that now took place, I shall notice none of the combatants except those whom I have named, and the persons whom they encountered.

The day had advanced some way; many courses had been run; and Henry himself had broken a lance with his brother-in-law, the Duke of Savoy, with infinite skill and grace, no eye being able to perceive that the shock of the lances had in the slightest degree shaken the monarch in the saddle. The duke, however, had wavered considerably, and it was evident that Henry was pleased at his triumph. Each of the challengers was appointed to run three courses, and a fresh lance was delivered into Henry's hand, as the Duke of Guise presented himself at the opposite side of the lists. Again the trumpets sounded, and again the king ran his course with the same success. Both lances were shivered in a moment, and the air echoed and re-echoed with the shouts and applauses of the people, while many a beautiful lip from

the balconies and galleries around exclaimed aloud, "Long live the king! Long live King Henry!"

Henry smiled and bowed, and, raising the visor of his helmet, gazed around him, marking with a slight inclination of his head such members of the court as he knew more intimately. Among the faces round, the fair but now pale countenance of Isabel de Brienne was to be seen, led thither by some vague hopes regarding the fate and fortune of him she loved.

Nor was he absent; for, after a long conversation during the morning with the Maréchal de Vieilleville, he had stationed himself, when the lists opened, near the barrier by which the challengers entered. He was unarmed, indeed, except with the ordinary sword which every gentleman then wore as a part of his apparel; and his dress, though rich in materials, was accidentally —for he had not chosen it with any care—sad and sombre in colour.

The king had taken no notice of him as he rode in, and, at the time, did not seem to remark him; but the immediate glance with which the monarch's eye now wandered from the countenance of Isabel to that of her lover, showed that, in fact, Henry had seen him as he passed. As he thus turned, he smiled slightly upon the young nobleman; and, while they were bringing him another lance to run the last course, he bent his head towards the barrier, saying, "How is it you are not armed, Monsieur de Rohan? You should have been among our adversaries there."

"I had no heart, sire, to put on armour to-day," replied Bernard de Rohan; and, before he could say more, the lance was given into the king's hand, and the young Count of Montgomery, the son of the Count de Lorges, presented himself as the king's last opponent.

Whether Henry was himself tired, or whether his horse was fatigued with the encounter, cannot be said; but certainly he did not sit so firmly as in the preceding course, and, in the shock of the lances, was bent considerably back in the saddle. In the mean time, the Maréchal de Vieilleville, who stood by the paling completely armed, and ready to succeed the king, beckoned to Bernard de Rohan, and spoke a few words to him over the barrier. The young cavalier immediately sprang over into the lists; and Vieilleville said, pointing to the king, who was at that very moment in full career

towards Montgomery, with the whole trumpets sounding a charge, so that it was scarcely possible for any one to hear at a distance, "Now, De Rohan, now! Now is your time, or never; he is in high good-humour at this moment with his success. He was somewhat moved by what I said last night. Speak to him whenever he returns: I will second you warmly, and in this joyful moment perhaps we may succeed."

"God grant it!" replied Bernard de Rohan; "but I do not think it. I feel a degree of despondency upon me which makes me view everything in a dark light. I dreamed last night that I had killed the king. It was something which he said about my wishing for his death which, I know, was the occasion of such idle nonsense coming into my head; but still it has made me feel unhappy."

"I dreamed last night that I saw him dead," replied De Vieilleville, "and cannot get it out of my mind; but here he is coming back. Now, De Rohan, now!"

Neither of the two had remarked accurately how the last course had gone. They saw, alone, that two lances had been shivered, and that the king kept his seat; but they had not seen the little mortification that he had undergone: neither could they tell what were his feelings by the expression of his countenance, for his visor was still down. Under these circumstances, the maréchal and the young nobleman approached his stirrup as he rode up. The latter addressed a few words to the monarch which he did not appear to hear; and, raising his visor, Henry bent down his head, with a frowning brow and a reddened cheek, demanding somewhat sharply what was the boon he asked. De Vieilleville was coming up to support him in his petition—a petition which the reader may well divine; but the king's unhappy jester, whose malice was certainly far greater than his wit, and who, in other days, had caused a breach wellnigh irreparable between Henry and his father, now interposed, as if to explain what Bernard de Rohan desired.

Whether he had been tutored by the friends of the Count de Meyrand, or spoke solely for the purpose of making mischief, cannot be told; but he said, "The noble baron, my lord king, seeks only to unhorse you from your vow, as my cousin Montgomery had wellnigh done just now from your beast's back. I think you are

somewhat shaken in the saddle, Henry. Cannot you slip off over the horse's tail before the force of his petition, and let him win the day?"

"Get out of the way, fool!" cried Henry. "Now, sir, what is it that you want? In the noise all round I did not hear you."

"May it please you, sire," said Vieilleville, in his blunt but respectful manner, "he comes to ask, and I to second him in asking, that which, if you refuse, it can be but for the sole purpose of showing that once in your reign you refused justice to a subject. He beseeches your majesty either at once to give him the hand of Mademoiselle de Brienne, or to proclaim a pardon to the Count of Meyrand upon condition that he comes back and does battle with him he has slandered, according to the law of arms. He thinks that in this moment of joy and triumph you will not refuse him."

"He thinks wrong," replied the king, "and you think wrong too, De Vieilleville. I have not forgotten the business of Jarnac; so no more of such proposals to me. And then, again, for the other part of your demand: I answered this young man yesterday, and, moreover, forbade him ever to mention this subject to me again. If I live till I am as broken with age as that broken truncheon," and he cast from him the remains of the lance he had lately held, "he shall not wed Isabel of Brienne till my dying day! Let the lists be cleared. There are many persons within the barriers who have no business here. Herald, go to the Count of Montgomery, and tell him the king will break another lance with him."

"I beseech you, sire," said the Maréchal de Vieilleville, "do not think of doing so. You have run three courses with all honour. It is my turn to run as the next challenger; and I would have you remember that these exercises sometimes have dangerous consequences. I dreamed last night evil dreams of your majesty, and so did Monsieur de Rohan."

"Psha!" cried the king; "talk of auguries to the queen. She deals in dreams and prognostications, not I. What were your dreams, De Vieilleville?"

"I dreamed that your majesty was dead," replied De Vieilleville, "and so did Monsieur de Rohan."

"Perhaps he wished it," said Henry, somewhat bitterly; "for, until I be dead, my word is unchangeable."

"Oh, sire!" replied Bernard de Rohan, with a reproachful look.

"Well, well!" replied Henry, somewhat touched by the expression of the young nobleman's countenance, "there I believe I did you wrong."

"If, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, "the best blood in this heart could give one year more of your life to the people that love you, I would shed it right willingly; and would to God you would now let me mount Monsieur de Vieilleville's horse, and in this silken jerkin as I am, ride the next course instead of you; for I know not how it is, but my heart misgives me sadly."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" cried Henry. "What says Montgomery, herald? Why has he dismounted?"

"Sire, he beseeches your majesty to pardon him," replied the herald; "but he says his is not the next course, and the other gentlemen will take it ill if he runs out of his due turn."

"We will satisfy them!" replied the king. "We will satisfy them! Tell him perforce he must ride another course with me, for, by the Lord! he wellnigh unhorsed me, and I must have my revenge."

The herald proceeded to execute the king's commands, and spoke to the Count of Montgomery at the other side of the lists, who thereupon turned round, as if apologizing to a gentleman near, who was just putting his foot in the stirrup. The young count then mounted slowly, and evidently unwillingly. It seems as if every one but the king himself presaged some accident. Henry, however, sat calm and tranquil on his horse, chose a lance out of a number of stout staves that were brought to him, and, as soon as he saw Montgomery ready, gave the signal for the trumpets to sound.

The trumpets did sound accordingly; but—whether it was that the course was out of the usual order of the tournament, or that the many prognostications of evil which the astrologers and dreamers of dreams had been visited with, created a more than ordinary interest in this last course that the king was to run—not only was every head bent forward from windows, balconies, and barriers, but every lip was silent in expectation; and, to the surprise of all, the trumpets and clarions suddenly ceased after once sounding the charge, and, instead of deafening the ear with loud and reiterated notes, as was

customary, left a dead stillness over the whole field, through which was heard alone the galloping forward of the champion's horses.

They met in full career, and Henry, sitting his horse strongly, splintered his lance in a moment against the breast of Montgomery. The count shivered his upon the shield of the king, and for a single instant the eyes of those who were so eagerly watching thought that the course was ended, and the king secure; but, carried on by the fiery speed at which they had been going, the two horses rushed on after the shock; and at that moment it was remarked that the Count of Montgomery had not cast away the truncheon of his splintered lance, but carried it still in the rest. Some of the gazers saw, and some did not see, that the staff of the broken lance struck the king on the helmet; but it seemed so slight a blow, even to those who remarked it, that no apprehensions were entertained, though the monarch wavered a little in the saddle.

A moment after, however, it was seen that he had let go his hold of the reins; and, ere the horse, galloping on unrestrained, reached the opposite side of the lists, the king fell forward on his neck, and had wellnigh been cast to the ground.

The master of the horse and the chief equerry, whose task it was to meet the king at the end of the course and aid him to dismount, now sprang forward; and while the one seized the bridle, the other caught the monarch in his arms. It was then seen that blood was dropping through the bars of his helmet, and he exclaimed in a faint voice, "Take off the casque! take off the casque! Ah, cursed course! If I had listened to Vieilleville, this would not have happened! I feel that I am a dead man!"

They hastened to remove his headpiece as he commanded, and then, indeed, a terrible sight presented itself; for the splintered end of the lance had struck him in the right eye, which it had utterly destroyed, and entered apparently some way into the brain. He had not lost all his strength, however, nor had his intellect as yet been affected. "Where is De Vieilleville?" he said; "where is De Vieilleville?"

"Here, sire," said the Maréchal de Vieilleville, who, the moment the accident had happened, had hurried across the lists with Bernard de Rohan. "Here, sire: I hope your majesty is not much hurt."

"To the death, Vieilleville! to the death!" replied Henry. "Would that I had taken your advice! But one cannot avoid one's destiny. Take me to my chamber, my good friend: I make you superintendent thereof. Let no one enter on any pretence but the surgeons. No, not one; for I feel my mind begin to wander, and no one must see me thus. Ah! Monsieur de Rohan, if you wished me dead, you are now satisfied!"

Thus speaking, he was led away by De Vieilleville and the master of the horse, taking advantage of their support apparently more on account of the agony he suffered than from loss of strength in consequence of his wound.

Bernard de Rohan gazed after him with a deep sigh, and was then turning to the part of the lists where Isabel de Brienne sat. He had seen her for a short time the night before, and they had parted with feelings akin to despair. Now, however, he might, indeed, bear to her a renewal of hope; but that hope, he felt, must be so shadowed by grief for his king, and dark apprehensions for his native land, that it could scarcely afford any comfort to her or to himself. Ere he had half crossed the open space, however, a group of three or four persons, consisting of officers of the court, who had been conversing eagerly together after the king was led away, followed the young cavalier at a quick pace, and came somewhat closer to him than seemed necessary. As all was by this time confusion and dismay, he took no notice, but was walking on, when he was suddenly seized by both arms, and one of the gentlemen, whom he did not know, told him he was a prisoner.

"The king's words, Monsieur de Rohan, were too significant to be mistaken," he said. "We cannot suffer you to quit this place till the matter has been reported to the prévôt, and his opinion taken."

"Let it be quickly, sir," said Bernard de Rohan. "The king's words bore a very different signification from that which you attribute to them, as Monsieur de Vieilleville can explain to you at once."

"We have already sent to the prévôt," said the gentleman, "and here comes our messenger back again."

"Well, sir, what says the prévôt?" said Bernard de Rohan, as another officer came up. "Application had better at once be made to Monsieur de Vieilleville."

"Monsieur de Vieilleville is shut up in the king's

chamber," replied the officer, "and no one is admitted except the surgeons. The reply of the prévôt is, that Monsieur de Rohan must be kept under arrest in the Châtelet till the king's words are properly explained."

In half an hour more, Bernard de Rohan found himself once more a prisoner in the tower of the Châtelet. The governor grinned as he received him; and, though he was not now put in one of the lower dungeons, every other sort of severity was exercised upon him, on the pretence of ensuring against his escape. Bernard de Rohan, however, bore the whole lightly, perfectly certain that sooner or later this new difficulty would vanish from his path. His grief for the king, indeed, was deep and sincere; and, as every sort of information was refused him regarding Henry's state, he was left in all the pain of uncertainty. On the third day of his imprisonment, some sounds of lamentation and prayer reached his ear, as if rising from the court below; and, about half an hour after, just as night was falling, the governor told him, with a meaning smile, that the noise he had heard was occasioned by the execution of two wretched men, who had been decapitated that afternoon in consequence of an order from the palace.* Although these tidings did not produce such apprehensions in regard to his own fate as the governor expected, yet it saddened him much, for the thought suggested by such acts were all painful to a kind and feeling heart like his.

He sat up pondering these things till nearly midnight, when suddenly the great bell of the gate was heard to ring, and shortly after he could distinguish various steps ascending the stairs. The bars were cast down, the door was unlocked, and the governor appeared, followed by two officers of the prévôt. They seemed surprised to find him up, but informed him that he was to be conducted immediately to the palace of the Tournelles.

To the governor Bernard de Rohan would not apply for information of any kind; and the prévôt's officers, though extremely civil, could afford him none. The order they had received, they said, appeared to emanate

* This execution was probably that of two men, whose heads were struck off in the court of the Châtelet for the purpose of giving the surgeons of Henry the Second an opportunity of examining anatomically the seat of his wound.

from the grand master; and, having set off instantly, they had not even heard a report of what was the ulterior object of sending for the prisoner to the palace.

The young cavalier, however, made no delay; and, though the distance was considerable, he soon reached the spot where the Tournelles rose in one large dark mass, at the side of the Rue de Saint Antoine, bearing in the calm, solemn moonlight a very different aspect from that which it had displayed when last he beheld it. It was now the abode of mourning and grief; and, as Bernard de Rohan was led along through many a wide hall and long corridor, no sound met his ears, in a place usually so full of gayety and mirth. He was at length conducted into a small tapestried chamber, where an usher sat reading by a solitary lamp. The moment the man saw him he started up and said, "Wait for one moment, sir, and I will announce that you are here. You may go," he added, speaking to the two officers; "you will not be wanted any more."

The two men obeyed at once, and Bernard de Rohan was left alone for a few minutes. At length the usher returned, and merely saying, in a low tone, "Follow me, sir," he led the way onward, with a noiseless foot, to a small antechamber, where two or three of the royal servants were standing in silence on either side. Upon a table in the midst appeared many drugs and some surgical instruments;* and the awful stillness was only broken by a faint voice speaking in the room beyond.

To the door of that room the usher now led him, and opened it gently, saying, in a low tone, "You are to go in, sir."

Bernard de Rohan entered accordingly, and found himself in the death-chamber of Henry the Second. There were two or three persons standing round the rich carved bed at the farther side of the room, among whom the young cavalier distinguished—though there was no light but that which proceeded from a shaded lamp—the forms of a priest and Monsieur de Vieilleville. The latter, on seeing some one enter, came forward with a noiseless step, and took De Rohan's hand. "The king has recovered his senses," he said, in a whisper; "and, having seen the queen and the dauphin, with whom he is now speaking, ordered you to be sent for."

* In the famous collection called "*les quarante tableaux*," which contains a representation of the chamber of Henry II. at his death, this table is placed in the bedroom.

"I rejoice to hear he is better," replied the young cavalier.

But Vieilleville shook his head with a melancholy gesture. "It is death, De Rohan," he said, "it is death, not recovery, that gives him back his reason. Come quietly up to his bedside, and I will mention your name in a moment."

Bernard de Rohan followed him with a noiseless step to the bed, where, pale and haggard, with his head covered with bandages, lay the once gay and powerful Henry the Second. As they advanced, the figure of the dauphin flitted past from the other side; but the priest remained by the king's pillow, and the surgeon stood at the foot of the couch.

"Here is Monsieur de Rohan, sire," said De Vieilleville, in a low tone.

"Ha!" said the king, turning uneasily in his bed, "ha! I am glad you are come. You have accused me of injustice, Monsieur de Rohan; and perhaps I have been harsh towards you. Harsh, but not willingly unjust. However, I cannot make a clear breast without asking your forgiveness—"

"And doing what you can to atone for all the gentleman has suffered," said the priest.

"Well, I will atone too," said the king. "There is but one thing, De Rohan, which I can give that you hold to be worth having. It shall be yours, notwithstanding all—"

Bernard de Rohan knelt down by the king's bedside, and kissed his burning hand. "Speak not of it now, sire," he said, "nor say one word that can trouble or agitate you at the present moment. Be assured that I have ever loved you; that I love you still; and that, if I could restore you to health, my own life would be but a poor sacrifice."

"Ah! there you make it worse," said the king, "by speaking such affection when I have not deserved it. However, you forgive me. Is it not so?"

"If there be aught to be forgiven, sire," replied De Rohan, "I do forgive it from my very heart."

"Then go to my son Francis," said the king. "He will soon be King of France. A young and inexperienced one, alas! Uphold him with your sword, De Rohan, and with your counsel. Go to him, De Rohan. He knows my will regarding you, and will prize you highly."

Bernard de Rohan once more kissed the king's hand, and silently quitted the room. As he passed through the antechamber, one of the servants stepped forward, saying, "The king dauphin"—so Francis was called after his marriage with the beautiful Mary Queen of Scots—"the king dauphin, sir, has ordered me to conduct you to him. He is now in the green hall."

Bernard de Rohan merely motioned with his hand to lead on, and followed; and at the other end of the building he was led into a large room covered with green tapestry, and but dimly lighted. The prince, who was soon to receive the crown of that great empire, was leaning on the table, speaking low, but earnestly, to the fair young being who had lately become his bride. Behind her stood a lady of the middle age; but on her left hand was one, the sight of whom, though her face was shaded from the light, caused Bernard de Rohan's heart to beat high.

"Ah, De Rohan!" said the dauphin, turning round to greet him, "this is a terrible hour in which we meet once more. However, my father has commissioned me to do this;" and, taking the hand of Isabel de Brienne, he placed it in that of her lover, never to be separated from it again.

We need say but little more. In the table of contents attached to an old book, the greater part of which is not to be met with, I find these words, which probably give us a brief account of the farther history of one of our characters: "Meyrand, the Count of, abandons the service of France—goes over to the enemy with his company—grief and shame of his friends—his miserable death."

The pages to which these heads refer are marked down carefully; but, as those pages are now lost for ever, we can give no farther information on that point.

It only remains to be said, that some years after the period of which we have just been writing, there might be found, not far from the frontiers of Savoy, a fine old hall in one of the castles of the time, wherein sported a group of beautiful children round an old man dressed in the ecclesiastical habit, who amused them, even then, with many a quip, and sally, and gay jest and trick, though age had cast winter upon his brow, and dimmed the brightness of his eye.

A renowned warrior, and a lady still in the brightness of her beauty, sat at the head of the hospitable table

which that hall daily displayed; and on the right hand of that lady, each day, appeared the good old almoner we have mentioned; while still, before the carvers began to do their duty, she turned round with a kindly smile, and asked Father Willand to bless the meat.

THE END.

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